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SALLY AND LIEUTENANT FLEURY WERE WALKING SIDE BY SIDE AWAY FROM THE FARM HOUSE.

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ON THE FIELD OF HONOR

BY

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ILLUSTRATED

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STORIES ABOUT CAMP FIRE GIRLS

List of Titles in the Order of their Publication

THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT SUNRISE HILL
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AMID THE SNOWS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN THE OUTSIDE WORLD
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ACROSS THE SEA
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS' CAREERS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS IN AFTER YEARS
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE EDGE OF THE DESERT
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS AT THE END OF THE TRAIL
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS BEHIND THE LINES
THE CAMP FIRE GIRLS ON THE FIELD OF HONOR

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CHAPTER I

An Old House

THERE are certain old houses in New York City built of rose-colored brick and white stone which face Washington Square.

On this morning in early winter a light snow covered the ground and clung to the bare branches of the shrubs and trees.

In a drawing-room of one of the old houses a young girl was moving quietly about at work. She was alone and the room was almost entirely dismantled, the pictures having been taken down from the walls, the decorations stored away and the furniture protected by linen covers.

The girl herself was wearing an odd costume, a long frock made like a

peasant's smock with an insignia of two crossed logs and a flame embroidered upon one sleeve. With her dark eyes, her dark, rather coarse hair, which she wore parted in the middle over a low forehead, and her white, unusually colorless skin, she suggested a foreigner. Nevertheless, although her mother and father were born in Russia, Vera Lagerloff was not a foreigner. However, at this moment she was talking quietly to herself in a foreign tongue, yet the language she was making an attempt to practice was French and not Russian. Since the entry of the United States into the world war, New York City had been exchanging peoples as well as material supplies with her Allies to so large an extent that *one* language was no longer sufficient even for the requirements of one's own country.

Finally, still reciting her broken sentences almost as if she were rehearsing a part in a play, Vera walked over to a front window and stood gazing expectantly out into the Square as if she were looking for some one.

It was about three o'clock in the after-

noon and the neighborhood was almost deserted. In the paths beyond the Washington Arch a few children were playing. Now and then an occasional man or woman passed along the street, to vanish into a house or apartment building.

A few taxis and private cars rolled by, but not one made even a pretence of stopping before the rose-colored brick house.

After about five minutes of waiting, sighing and then, smiling at her own folly, the girl turned away and began slowly to climb up the old colonial stairs leading to the second floor.

"When will human beings cease demanding the impossible?" she asked of herself, yet speaking aloud. "I know that Mrs. Burton and Bettina cannot arrive for another half hour, nevertheless I am wasting both time and energy watching for their appearance."

During the past month Vera Lagerloff had been the guest of Mrs. Richard Burton in her New York home. Together they had been closing the house for an indefinite period and making their final arrangements for sailing for France. Within a

few days the American Sunrise Camp Fire unit, with Mrs. Burton as their guardian, was to set sail to help with the work of reclamation in the devastated area of France and also to establish the first group of Camp Fire girls ever recognized upon French soil.

Since their summer "Behind the Lines" in southern California, Vera had been studying with these two purposes in mind.

In the front of the house on the second floor Mrs. Burton's private sitting-room was to be left undisturbed until the day of her departure, and it was toward this room Vera was making her way.

Except for the two servants, man and wife, engaged only a short time before, who were presumably busy downstairs, she supposed herself alone.

Now as she approached the sitting-room, through the open door she caught sight of the blue and silver of the walls, a pair of old blue curtains and a tea-table decorated with a tea-service and a blue bowl of yellow jonquils. Then an unlooked-for sensation made the girl pause within a few feet on the far side of the

threshold, almost holding her breath, for she had the extraordinary impression that the room she had presumed empty was already occupied.

The next instant Vera discovered that a man was standing in front of a small mahogany desk endeavoring to break into a locked drawer. He had not heard her approach, for he did not turn toward her, nevertheless she immediately recognized the man and the situation. The day before, in order to meet the expenses of the journey to France, Mrs. Burton had drawn a large sum of money from bank, placing it in her desk for safe keeping. To the members of her own household she had made no secret of this, and now one of them was taking advantage of his knowledge.

Vera recognized that she must think and act quickly, or it might be possible that all their hopes and plans for service in France would vanish in one tragic instant.

In the bedroom in the rear of the hall she knew there was a telephone. Yet the moments occupied in having the telephone

answered and in calling the police seemed interminable. In far less time surely the thief must have accomplished his design!

Yet naturally after her call had been answered Vera knew she must return to make sure and equally naturally she feared to face the man were he still upstairs.

In the right hand corner of Mrs. Burton's dressing table was a silver mounted pistol. This had been Captain Burton's parting gift to his wife before his own departure for Europe a few weeks before. Vera distinctly remembered her own and Mrs. Burton's nervousness over the gift and Captain Burton's annoyance. They were about to make their home in a devastated country recently occupied by the enemy and yet were afraid of so simple a method of self-protection! Vera had shared in Captain Burton's lecture and in his instructions.

Moreover, ordinarily she was not timid, but instead possessed a singular feminine courage. So an instant later, holding the small pistol partly concealed by her skirt, Vera slipped noiselessly back again into

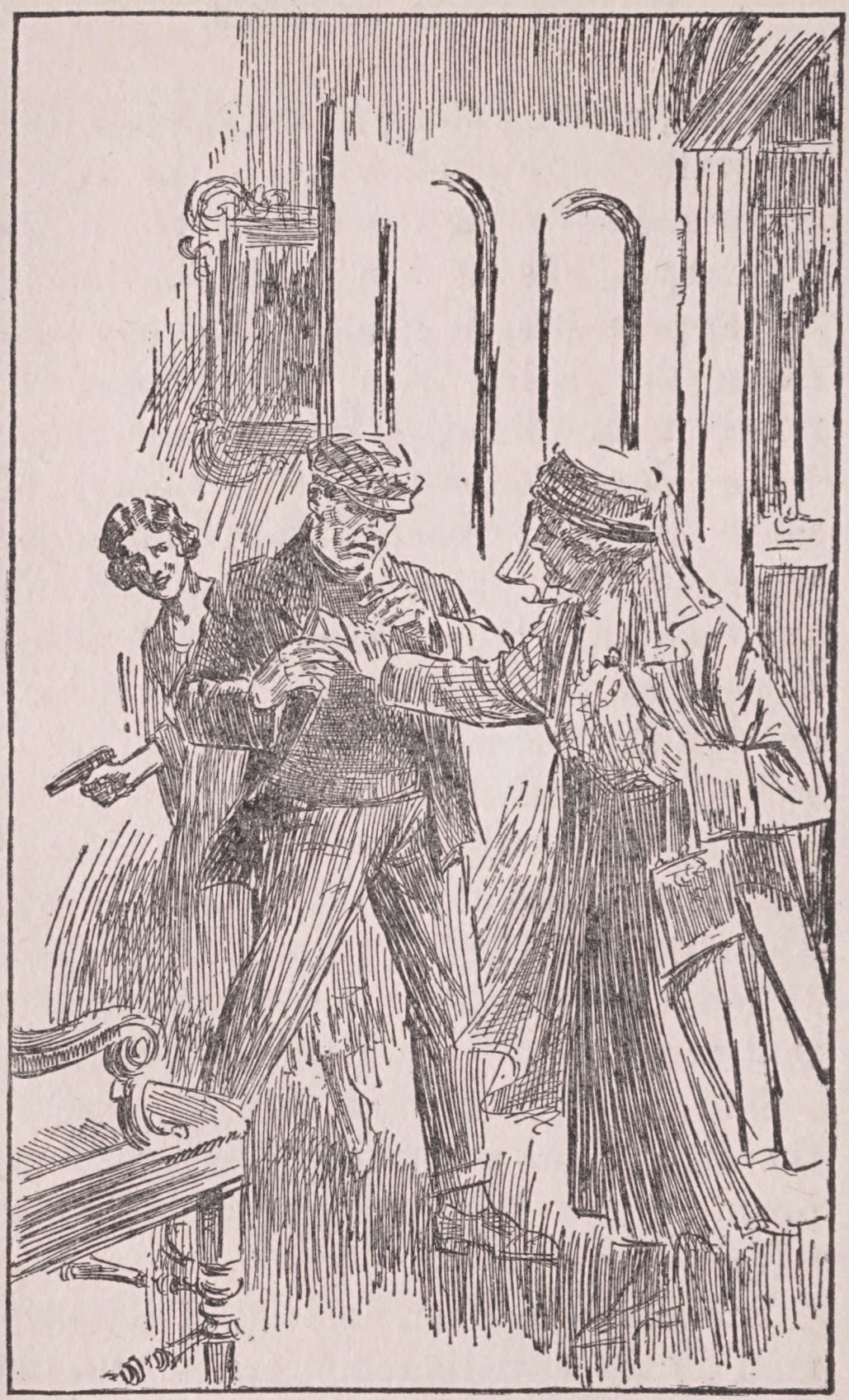
the hall, moving along in the shadow near the wall. Within a few feet of the sitting-room suddenly the thief appeared in the doorway. The next instant, startled by her appearance, he made a headlong rush down the stairs with his purpose too nearly accomplished to think of surrender.

As Vera followed she wondered if, when the thief reached the front door, where he must pause in opening it, would she then have the courage to fire? Much as she desired to secure the stolen money, she felt the instinctive feminine dislike of wounding another human being.

Yet now she discovered that, in spite of having failed to notice the fact on her way upstairs, the front door was not locked. It had been purposely left slightly ajar so that there need be no dangerous delay.

But before the thief actually reached the front door majestically it was flung open. From the outside a voice called "Halt."

Immediately after, instead of a policeman as she anticipated, Vera beheld one of the most singular figures she had ever seen. For the moment, in her excitement



"Have You Nothing Better to do than Steal?"

and confusion, she could not tell whether the figure was a woman's or a man's. A long arm was thrust forward, then, such was the thief's surprise, that he allowed the stolen pocketbook to be removed from his grasp without opposition.

As Vera regained sufficient equanimity to cover him with her pistol she heard a rich Irish voice unmistakably a woman's, saying:

"Sure, man alive and have you nothing better to do than steal when the world is so hard put for honest soldiers and workmen to carry on her affairs. Now get you away and pray the saints to forgive you, for the next time you'll not be let off so easily."

Glad to take the newcomer at her word, the man vanished. Then before Vera could either move or speak, the surprising visitor marched up to her.

"Put that pistol away, child, and never handle it again, or you will injure yourself! Now take me upstairs to Polly Burton's sitting-room and make me some tea, for the plain truth is I am famished. I have just arrived in New York from Boston, and

travel in war times certainly has its drawbacks. But if you will wait I'll first bring my suitcase inside the hall until we feel more like carrying it upstairs."

Before Vera could offer her assistance a shabby suitcase was brought indoors.

Immediately after she found herself, not leading the way, but following the unexpected intruder to the second floor. Evidently the elderly woman was familiar with the house, for she made her way directly to the sitting-room and, seating herself upon the divan, began untying her bonnet strings.

In spite of her own confusion and excitement and the visitor's surprising appearance, Vera believed herself in the presence of an important personage. She understood this, notwithstanding the fact that the woman's costume was conspicuously shabby and she herself extremely plain.

The bonnet which she removed without waiting to be asked followed a fashion of about a quarter of a century before. When her traveling coat had been laid aside the

black dress underneath was almost equally old-fashioned in design.

"Here, child, please take this money and hide it in the same place, or find a safer one," she announced. "Yet it may be just as well not to mention the robbery to Polly Burton. She is sure to need more strength than she possesses to be able to start on this perilous journey to France almost at the beginning of winter, with only you foolish children as her companions. Besides, I presume Polly left the money in the most conspicuous place in the house; she never has learned not to trust the entire world. I allowed the thief to escape so we need give no further time to him. But tell me the whole story—who are you, how did the man get into the house and why are you here alone?"

At last, in the first opportunity which had been vouchsafed her, Vera endeavored to explain what had occurred. As she spoke she could feel herself being observed with the keenest, most searching scrutiny. Yet for some reason, although never having heard the name or seen her companion before, she had no thought of disputing her

visitor's right to whatever information she desired. The dark eyes in the weather-beaten old face were wise and kind; the manner belonged to a woman accustomed to being obeyed.

Later Vera and her guest made a careful tour of the lower part of the house. Of course the cook had vanished soon after her husband. But they were downstairs in time to meet the police when they finally made their appearance.

Vera opened the door, yet she stood aside to hear her companion announce.

"You can go away again. No, we have no need of you, the telephone call was a mistake."

Finally when the police had disappeared without requiring a great deal of persuasion, for the second time Vera followed her unknown companion upstairs.

"You understand, child, it would have been the greatest interruption to our present plans if I had not permitted the thief to escape. Some one would have had to appear in court and doubtless Polly Burton would have had newspaper reporters coming to the house at all hours. They

would have liked a story in which a woman of her prominence played a part."

Fifteen minutes later, having presented the unexpected guest with the tea she had requested, Vera was sitting beside the tea table waiting to satisfy her further needs, when she caught the sound of a key being turned in the lock of the front door downstairs and the next instant Mrs. Burton's voice, followed by Bettina Graham's, calling for her.

With a hurried apology and really fearful that her autocratic companion might attempt to detain her, Vera ran out of the room.

Over the banisters she could see Bettina Graham, who had just arrived from Washington, and Mrs. Burton, who had gone down to the Pennsylvania station to meet her.

Standing near Bettina was a girl whom Vera had never seen before.

As soon as she joined them Bettina introduced her explaining:

"Vera, this is Mary Gilchrist, who is going abroad to drive a motor in France. She had no friends with whom she could

cross, and as we were intending to sail on the same steamer, I suggested when we met in Washington the other day that she might like to join our Camp Fire unit. At the depot I introduced her to Tante, who of course insisted that she come home with us rather than stay in a hotel alone."

During this conversation, Mrs. Richard Burton, the Sunrise Camp Fire guardian of former days, having passed by the group of girls, was making her way upstairs alone. She had moved so quickly that, in her effort to be polite to Bettina's new friend, Vera had no opportunity to mention the presence of another stranger in the house. When she did murmur something, Mrs. Burton did not hear.

Reaching her own sitting-room she gazed uncertainly for half an instant at the tall figure on the divan, who, having poured herself another cup of tea, was now engaged in drinking it. The next she clasped her hands together and with a manner suggesting both nervousness and apology, began.

"Aunt Patricia, please don't say you have come to argue with me about taking

my group of Sunrise Camp Fire girls to work with me in the devastated area of France. It is really too late now to interfere. I was finally able to secure my husband's permission."

Miss Patricia Lord carefully set down her tea-cup.

"Come and kiss me, Polly Burton, and tell me you are glad to see me. I don't like your fashion of greeting an unexpected guest. But there—you look tired out from too much responsibility before it is time to set sail! As a matter of fact, I have not come to try to *prevent* your going to France. Has anybody ever made you give up anything you had firmly set your heart upon? But, mavourneen, I have come to go with you. Do you suppose for a moment, after receiving yours and Richard's letters telling me of your plans, that I dreamed of allowing you to undertake such a project as you have in mind alone? Why, you won't be able to look after yourself properly, to say nothing of more than half a dozen young girls! I am told there are eight hundred and forty thousand homeless people in the devas-

tated districts of France at the present time and I cannot understand why you wish to add to the number. But as you will go, well, I am determined to go with you."

A moment later, seated close beside the older woman, Mrs. Burton had slipped an arm inside hers and was holding it close.

"Oh, Aunt Patricia, I am so relieved," she murmured. "I have not confided this fact to any one before, but sometimes I have been so nervous over the prospect of looking after my group of Camp Fire girls in France that I have wanted to run away and hide where no one could ever discover me. Of course I am not afraid of disaster for myself, Richard is in France and then nothing ever happens to me! Besides, no one has a right to think of oneself at present. But to be responsible to so many mothers for the safety of their beloved daughters! I rise up each morning feeling that my hair must have turned white in the night from the very thought. But if you are with me, why, I will not worry! Still I don't see just how you can arrange to sail with us; perhaps you can manage to

cross later, but our passage has been engaged for weeks and——"

Miss Patricia Lord arose and walked over to the tea table, where she devoted her energy to pouring her hostess a cup of tea.

"You need not trouble about *my* arrangements, Polly. I secured my ticket on the steamer upon which you are to sail some time ago and also my passport. I sent my trunk directly to the boat. Of course I am taking but few clothes with me, as a matter of fact, I have all I shall require in my suitcase downstairs. But later there will be many things necessary for our housekeeping in France of which you may not have thought."

CHAPTER II

Explanations

"BETTINA, who on earth is Miss Patricia Lord? A more formidable lady I never imagined!"

Sitting before a fire in their bedroom, which they had chosen to share so as to be able to talk for as long a time as they wished before retiring, were the two Sunrise Camp Fire girls, Bettina Graham and Vera Lagerloff. Both girls had changed conspicuously in manner and appearance since the summer before when they had been in camp together "Behind the Lines" in southern California. However, there comes a day in every girl's life when with entire suddenness she seems to understand and accept the revelation of her womanhood.

To Bettina Graham had been given an added social experience. During the past few months, without being formally introduced into society, nevertheless she had

been assisting her mother in receiving in their home in Washington. In spite of the fact that there had been but little entertaining on a large scale because of the war, Bettina had gone to occasional dinners and small dances, and on account of her father's prominence and her mother's popularity, had shared in the best opportunities. Moreover, Washington had never been so crowded with interesting men and women, and yet scarcely a day passed when Bettina did not whisper to herself that nothing could make her enjoy a conventional society existence. It was only because of the universal absorption in the war at the present time that society had become more endurable. But to continue the life indefinitely demanded an impossible sacrifice.

One afternoon in late fall Bettina and her father, Senator Graham, in an hour of mutual confidence, imparted the information to each other that they regarded themselves as social failures.

"You see, Bettina, my dear, I was not to the manner born in this social game and had no one to teach me until I married

your mother," Senator Graham announced with a certain embarrassment. "Indeed, I never had entered a drawing-room until I was a grown man and then had not the faintest idea how the confounded thing should be done. You don't think you could have inherited a social awkwardness from me?"

Then, fearing to have wounded his daughter's feelings Senator Graham added quickly: "I don't mean that you have not charming manners, little Betty, as charming as any in the world aside from your mother's. And personally I have not seen a prettier girl in Washington or elsewhere. But if you really are unhappy among strangers and would like to go to France with your old friends to help with the work over there, why, I will try to see how matters can be arranged. I don't think I would speak of your idea to your mother, not just at present, as there is no point in worrying her."

In answer Bettina had laughed and promised. Always she was touched by her father's use of her old childhood name

now that she had become nearly as tall as he himself was.

"But, father, don't think I mind sharing a social disability with you. I am afraid my infirmity goes somewhat deeper," Bettina answered. "As a matter of fact, I heard one of mother's friends say the other day that there was no more brilliant or agreeable man in Washington society than Senator Graham, once he could be persuaded to throw aside his social hauteur and condescend to ordinary mortals," she continued, imitating the visitor's voice and manner, to the Senator's deep amusement.

"But of course I won't annoy mother until I am sure our Camp Fire unit has a real chance of being accepted for the work in France. It is hard upon mother to have had Tony inherit all the family beauty and charm. However, he will make up to her some day for my failures!"

Bettina was doing herself an injustice. In reality she was unusually handsome and as she grew older her tall stateliness increased her distinction. Tonight she looked especially attractive as she sat

braiding her long yellow hair into two heavy plaits, with a blue corduroy dressing gown worn over her night-dress.

"Aunt Patricia? It is odd, Vera, you have never heard her name mentioned! Yet I confess my personal acquaintance with Aunt Patricia also began this afternoon, although I have known of her for a long time and my mother is one of her great friends.

"Years ago when Tante was first married Aunt Patricia arrived in this country from Ireland, and as she seemed to be frightfully poor she secured a position at the theatre as wardrobe woman. Right away she adopted Tante and Uncle Richard and they have been devoted to one another ever since. Later on Aunt Patricia's brother died, leaving her an enormous fortune. Then it developed that she had come to this country from Ireland because he had sent for her and afterwards had refused to live with him or accept a cent of his money because he would not do what she wished, or because for some reason or other she disapproved of him.

"After Aunt Patricia inherited the

money she has spent as little as possible for her own needs, but instead gives away large sums in eccentric fashions which appeal to her. Nevertheless I confess I am not happy over the prospect of her going to France to be with us, although Tante seems immensely relieved to have her companionship and our families will be glad to know she will not have to bear so much responsibility alone. It is a good deal of a task to look after seven or eight girls."

Vera frowned somewhat ruefully.

"But I thought we were going to France to care for other people not to be looked after ourselves. However, if Miss Lord's behavior this afternoon is a fair criterion I shall certainly become as a little child. For the entire time we were together I don't think I dared do anything except what she commanded. But isn't it wonderful that our entire Camp Fire unit is to go to France for the reclamation work? I thought when Mrs. Burton offered me the opportunity last summer that I should go alone."

Within the past months Vera Lagerloff

had also changed, but the transformation was unlike Bettina Graham's.

After Billy Webster's death in California Vera had made astonishingly little open protest. But for that reason the effect upon her character had been the deeper.

Since her earliest childhood there had been but little in her life for which she cared intensely, save her friendship with the odd dreaming boy, whose ambitions for his own future had absorbed so much of her time and thought. Until Billy died Vera really had never considered her own future apart from his.

In many ways she was superior to the members of her own family, which in itself makes for a certain spiritual loneliness. Yet her parents were Russians, and Russia is at present offering more contradictions in human nature than any other race of people in the world. However, if her parents were peasants and had but little education, they had possessed sufficient courage to emigrate to the United States at a time when the Czar and autocracy ruled in their own land. Afterwards Vera's father had become a small farmer

on Mr. Webster's large place, and here Vera and Billy had grown up together.

But at least Vera's family made no effort to interfere with her. The other children appeared content to follow in the ways of their ancestors, living with and by the land. In a measure they were proud that Vera cared for books and people who could never be their friends. Yet perhaps Vera's character had been largely influenced by her one singular friendship.

Now it remained to be seen what she could accomplish with her own life uninspired by a dominating affection.

She was an unusual looking girl, and not handsome according to Anglo-Saxon standards. She was tall and ruggedly built, with broad shoulders and hips, indicating strength more than grace. Her heavy dark hair, growing low over her forehead, had a unique quality of vitality. Her nose and mouth were both a little heavy, although her mouth gave promise of future beauty, and she had the fine Slavic eyes with the slight slant.

Vera and Bettina afforded a marked contrast. The one girl, whatever her bril-

liant father might say of his antecedents, showed only the evidences of high breeding, both its charm and limitations. Yet, thinking more deeply, was not after all Vera's the older ancestry since the first men and women must have been those who lived nearest to nature?

At this moment, when the one girl finished speaking, leaning over Bettina rested her chin in her slender hand. She had not seen Vera for some time and was now trying to discover in her companion's face what she knew would never be confided to her, to what extent Vera had recovered from her sorrow over Billy Webster's death.

But instead of speaking of this, Bettina continued:

"Yes, it is extraordinary that our entire Camp Fire unit is so soon to cross over to France. I only wish the rest of us were as well prepared for the work as you are, Vera. You have been studying cooking and the care of children, besides the first aid and the farm work, which you must have known already? I was able to find time for only a short period of intensive

study. Yet fortunately I know a good deal of French. Ever since I was a tiny child I have been speaking French and certainly I am familiar with our Camp Fire training and ideals. I only learned recently that, although there are organizations similar to our Camp Fire in England, China, Japan and Australia, there is none in France. Is it not a wonderful thing that we are to be the pioneers of the Camp Fire movement in France? Don't you feel that if we can arouse sufficient enthusiasm among the French girls to induce them to form a national organization it will bring American and French girls into closer touch with each other?

"Do you know, Vera, so many times in the past year I have heard prominent men in Washington declare that the French, British, Italians and Americans, having fought together on common ground for a common ideal, can never in the future be anything but brothers in spirit. Yet never once have I heard any one speak of the same need for intimate association among the women of the different nations. Why is this not equally important? The

women of the future must also acquire something of the new international spirit, must also learn to work and play together. I think our Camp Fire embodies all these inspiring principles and ideas for girls, and so I hope our work in France may be the beginning of an international Camp Fire organization all over the world."

Vera Lagerloff, who had apparently been watching the flickering yellow and rose flames in their tiny fire while Bettina talked, now looked toward her and smiled.

"Be careful, Bettina, you are a dreamer. Remember, the world has room for but a few dreamers. I suppose that is why Billy went away. After all, you know it is the small, hard sacrifices that are required of women and girls in time of war."

Then getting up, Vera began walking up and down the room as if finding relief in action.

"By the way, Bettina, have you heard the latest news from Gerry Williams?—oh, I should have said Gerry Morris, I forgot her married name." Vera went on, apparently desiring to change the subject:

"She hopes to see us after we reach our headquarters in France, if she and her father-in-law are not too far away. I have sometimes wondered if Mr. Morris did not give the money he had recently inherited to help with the restoration work in France as a thank offering because Felipe was required to serve only a short sentence for having tried to escape the draft? Soon after he was permitted to enlist. Mr. Morris and Gerry are living in one of the tiny ruined villages, assisting the old men and women and children to rebuild their little homes."

Bettina frowned, hardly aware that her expression had become slightly skeptical.

"Yes, I was told that Gerry had sailed with her father-in-law, although so far as I know Felipe is still in an American training camp," Bettina replied. "But, Vera, I am not yet an enthusiast over Gerry. However, as we have never liked each other, perhaps I am not fair. I do not believe that people's natures ever entirely change, even if circumstances do affect one for a time. So I shall have to behold the miracle of a transformed Gerry

before I am convinced of the change I am told has taken place in her."

At this instant Bettina suddenly ceased speaking because a faint knock had just sounded on their bedroom door.

When Vera opened the door another girl stood outside. She was small and dark and had an upward tilt to her nose and indeed to her entire face.

"I know this is the hour for confidences and so I won't interrupt you long," she began. "Only I thought it might be just as well if I present you with a short outline of my history. Miss Graham was kind enough to allow me to travel to Washington with her after meeting me at the home of a mutual friend. She does not know much about me, so I think she is especially kind. But perhaps we girls are beginning to take one another more for granted! As a matter of fact, my name is Mary Gilchrist, although I am usually called 'Gill' by my friends, because my father insists I am so small I represent the smallest possible measure. I have no mother and have spent all my life with my father on our big wheat ranch

in Kansas. I suppose I should have been a boy, because I adore machinery and have been driving a car for years, even before the law would have permitted me to drive one. Of course I only motored over our ranch at first. Now I am hoping I can be useful in France. For the last few years I have been able to manage a tractor for the plowing and harvesting of our fields. My father has given me my own motor to take to France. He said he could do nothing less, since he had no son to devote to his country's service and, as he was too old to fight himself, felt he could do his best work in increasing our output of wheat. But I did not intend saying so much about myself, only to thank you and Mrs. Burton for agreeing to allow me to make the crossing with you. I shall try not to be a nuisance. Good-night."

Then actually before Vera or Bettina could reply the other girl vanished. Yet she left behind her an affect of energy and warmth, her glowing, piquant face, the red lights in her brown hair, even the freckles on her clear, lightly tanned skin gave one

the impression that courage and action were essential traits of her character.

After she had gone Vera smiled.

"Well Bettina, I believe your new friend is original, whatever else she may be."

And Bettina nodded in agreement.

CHAPTER III

"A Long Time Going Over There"

IN a week Mrs. Burton and the Sunrise Camp Fire unit sailed from a port somewhere in the United States to a port somewhere in France. Not only were they accompanied by Miss Patricia Lord, but apparently they were led by her. Whenever any information had to be imparted it was always Miss Patricia who gave it and she also appeared to settle all questions and all disputes. Under ordinary circumstances the Camp Fire girls would have been annoyed, but at present they were too absorbed in a hundred interests and as many emotions to be more than vaguely aware of Miss Patricia's existence.

Mrs. Burton, in spite of finding her own position frequently usurped and her opinions regarded as of small value, nevertheless from the moment of leaving New York felt a sensation of gratitude each

time she glanced at Aunt Patricia's homely and uncompromising countenance. In time past they had weathered many storms together; if there were storms ahead Miss Patricia could be counted upon to remain firm as the Rock of Gibraltar. Difficult and domineering, yet behind her brusqueness there was great good sense. Moreover, Mrs. Burton knew that Miss Patricia possessed the gift of kindness which is the rarest of human qualities. The Irish humor was there also, although now and then it might be hidden out of sight and only used by Miss Patricia as she used her Irish brogue in moments of special stress.

Conscious that her group of Camp Fire girls was not pleased by the addition of a new member to their party, Mrs. Burton hoped in time they might come to appreciate Miss Patricia's real value, although she made no effort to propitiate them at the start.

The leave-taking these days is perhaps the hardest portion of the journey to France. One must say farewell with apparent cheerfulness to one's family and

friends, assuming that whatever dangers may lie in wait for other people, for you there can be only plain sailing, since this is the gallant spirit these tragic times demand. But for the Camp Fire girls there was also a certain fear that they might find themselves unfit for the service they wished to offer. However, there was no faltering and no regret, but only tremendous inspiration in the knowledge that they were to be the first American Camp Fire girls to enter France upon a special mission and with a special message to French girls.

Of the date or the port from which passenger vessels sail these days there is no published record. It is enough to state that the Camp Fire party sailed one morning in the early winter a little before noon from a small harbor south of New York City. The morning had been cold and rainy and the fog lay thick upon the water many miles from the land.

In spite of the fact that their vessel was to form one of a convoy of a dozen ships, each boat left port at a different hour, to meet further out at sea.

Soon after their own sailing, Mrs. Burton retired to her state-room. Aunt Patricia and the Camp Fire girls insisted upon remaining on deck for an indefinite length of time.

At what point the United States considers her ships have entered the danger zone on this side of the Atlantic only persons who have lately crossed to the other side can know.

When this hour arrived the Camp Fire girls were standing close together, although separated into small groups. Peggy Webster, Vera Lagerloff and Bettina Graham were talking to one another; Sally Ashton and Alice Ashton stood a short distance off with their arms about each other, drawn together only in moments of excitement. Within a few feet Marta Clark was beside Mary Gilchrist, with Aunt Patricia not far away, but apparently paying no attention to any of them.

In truth, it was Aunt Patricia who gave the first signal. The ships which until now had been at some distance apart were deliberately forming into the position

necessary for their convoy. It was almost as if they were making ready for a naval attack; the boats slowed down, mysterious whistles were blown, signals were run up.

An hour or so later and the entire convoy, guarded by United States torpedo destroyers, were steaming rapidly ahead.

Bettina Graham was leaning over the ship's railing looking toward the western line of the horizon through a pair of long-distance glasses. In another moment she offered the glasses to Vera.

"I wonder if you can see the destroyers more distinctly than I can manage, Vera? The fog is so heavy and the boats are so nearly the same color. No wonder they are known as the 'gray watch-dogs of the sea!' I suppose one should feel safer because we are so surrounded, and yet in a way I am more nervous. Certainly the destroyers do not allow one to forget the reason for their presence, and I really had not thought a great deal of our danger from submarines until they appeared."

For a few seconds as she stared through the glasses Vera made no reply.

As she turned to present the glasses to Peggy, Vera shook her head.

"Then I am a better American than you are, Bettina, because I most assuredly do not feel as you do. Our guard of destroyers gives me an almost perfect sense of security. It may be absurd of course and a kind of jingoism, but I do not consider that we can possibly come to grief, protected by our own navy."

As they stood thus close together the Camp Fire girls were wearing the uniforms which had been especially designed for their trip abroad.

Their ordinary Camp Fire outfit was of course not suitable; nevertheless the new costumes had been made to follow as closely as possible the idea and the model of the old. For military reasons they had chosen a darker shade of brown than the ordinary khaki color. At present over their serviceable brown serge traveling dresses they wore long coats of a golden brown cloth made with adjustable capes to conform with the changes of climate. The only suggestion of the Camp Fire was the insignia of the crossed logs with the

ascending flames embroidered upon one sleeve. Their hats were of soft brown felt.

In spite of the variety of striking and interesting uniforms on board ship, already the Camp Fire girls had excited a good deal of quiet attention. However, this may not have been due to their uniforms alone. As a matter of fact, they were younger than the other passengers and many persons were curious with regard to the work they were planning to undertake in France.

Sailing upon the same vessel there chanced to be a Red Cross unit of twenty other girls who were to do canteen work among the French and American soldiers. But except for one conspicuous exception, this unit of girls was noticeably older.

This made the one girl appear rather an outsider; moreover, the Camp Fire girls learned that she was not an American girl, but a French girl returning to her own country.

There were no passengers on the ship who were not sailing to France for urgent reasons and for reasons which the United

States government considered of sufficient importance to permit of their crossing.

There were a number of business men whose affairs were not only of importance to themselves, but to the Allied interests as well. There was a medical unit with a staff of doctors, nurses and assistants, three or four newspaper and magazine men, one well-known woman writer. But the most distinguished among the travelers were several returning Frenchmen who had been in the United States upon a special mission.

CHAPTER IV

Chaperoning the Chaperon

ONE afternoon about midway in the voyage across the Atlantic, Mrs. Burton was seated upon the upper deck in her steamer chair enveloped in a fur rug and a fur coat. A small sealskin turban completely covered her hair, so only her face was revealed, her brilliant blue eyes, long slender nose and chin, and her cheeks upon which two spots of color were glowing.

She was talking in French with a great deal of animation to a man who sat beside her. From his manner and appearance and also from his pronounciation it was self-evident that he was a Frenchman. Moreover, he revealed a certain intellectual distinction typically French. Monsieur Georges Duval was of middle age with clear-cut, aristocratic features, keen dark eyes and iron-gray hair. In

comparison with him Mrs. Burton looked like a girl.

It was just before tea time and the deck was crowded with the ship's passengers. Since no lights were permitted after dark, it was necessary to enjoy all the daylight possible out of doors. This afternoon was clear and lovely, with a serene blue sky and sea.

A number of the Camp Fire girls were strolling about talking to new acquaintances. But if Mrs. Burton had any knowledge of their presence she gave no sign, being too deeply interested in her conversation with her present companion.

"You are extremely kind, Monsieur, and I am most happy to receive any advice you can give me. Later on I shall probably ask for your aid as well. Now and then I have wondered if in coming to France to offer our services to your country many American women may not prove more of a burden than a help. I hope this may not be true of me or of my companions. We intend to settle down somewhere in one of the devastated districts and do whatever we can to be useful. But

chiefly the group of girls I have with me want to offer their services to French girls. I have so often thought, Monsieur, that perhaps the greatest problem of the future rests with the young girls of the present day. When the war is over it will be their task to care for the wounded men and for many others whom these long years of warfare will have made unfit for work. More than this, there will be so many of these girls who can never have husbands or children. Our Camp Fire organization in the United States has a special message for the women of the future. But I must not bore you with this when you have so many matters of more importance to hold your attention."

Monsieur Duval shook his head.

"You are not boring me, Madame. You could not do that, but in any case remember you are talking to a Frenchman about the women of his own country. Sometimes I think we Frenchmen confuse our women and our country; to us they are so much one and the same thing. When we fight for France, we are fighting for our women, when we fight to protect our

women we are fighting to save France. I do not believe the world half realizes what great burdens the French women bore after the Franco-Prussian war, only forty years ago, not only in working shoulder to shoulder with their men, but by inspiring them after a bitter and cruel defeat. The courage, the steadfastness which France has revealed in the four long years of this present war is one way in which we have tried to pay our immense debt to them."

Unable to reply because of the tears which she made no effort to conceal, Mrs. Burton remained silent for a few moments. When she finally spoke it was with a kind of diffidence:

"Monsieur Duval, has it ever occurred to you how strange it is that, aside from our American Revolution, most of the great modern wars for democracy have been fought upon French soil? I have thought of this many times and sorrowed over what seems the injustice to your race. Forgive me if I appear too fanciful! Recently I have recognized why France always is represented by the symbolic

figure of a woman. She has endured the birth of the world's freedom inside her body and her soul."

In Mrs. Burton's speech there was perhaps nothing original, but always there was the old thrilling beautiful quality to her voice which stirred her audience, whether large or small.

Monsieur Duval did not attempt to hide both his admiration and interest in his companion. The second day out at sea they had been introduced to each other by Mrs. Bishop, the woman novelist, with whom Mrs. Burton had a slight acquaintance in New York City. Indeed, they had met only upon one occasion, but on shipboard one is apt to renew acquaintances which one would have considered of no special interest at other times.

Since their original meeting Mrs. Burton and the French commissioner, whom she had discovered to be a member of the French senate as well, had spent several hours each day in talking together. There were many subjects in which they were both interested, although of course the

war absorbed the greater part of their thought.

"I only hope France may prove worthy of the sympathy and aid your country pours out upon her so generously. But I think when you reach France you will have no reason to complain of her lack of gratitude," the Frenchman answered.

"Of course our cause at present is a common one and our soldiers are fighting as brothers. But long before your men fought with ours, you American women were rendering us every possible service. Please be sure if I can be of the least assistance to you in making your plans for work in France I shall be more than happy. In spite of all our conversations you never have told me definitely what it is you intend doing."

Mrs. Burton smiled. A cool breeze was blowing in from the sea so that she hid herself closer inside her rug.

"Just a moment then, Monsieur Duval, I will talk of our plans and then we must discuss something frivolous. Every morning as I waken I make up my mind not to speak of the war for at least a few hours,

but somehow I never manage to keep my promise to myself. We intend undertaking a certain amount of reclamation work in one of the ruined French villages. Our present scheme is first to find an old farm house and establish ourselves there in order to make a home where our neighbors can come to us as they will. My Camp Fire girls thus hope to form friendships with the French girls and later to induce them to become interested in our Camp Fire ideas.

"You may be amused, Monsieur Duval, but another thing we intend is to teach the French women and girls to make corn bread, so as to help in the wheat conservation. I was told by a woman in Washington, who had just come back from the devastated regions, that this would be a real service to France, if once we could persuade the French people to our use of corn. The Indians taught us. As our Camp Fire is more or less modeled upon their institutions, we hope to carry on the Indian message of the corn. But enough of this; you have been kind to listen to me so long."

Monsieur Duval shook his head courteously.

"What you say is interesting and worth while, Madame, but I have an idea that you need not personally give all of your own time to these efforts. These matters your companions and other women may be able to accomplish with equal success. But you, you probably will find more important work to do in France. Perhaps you will allow me to see you later. I do not wish our acquaintance to end with our voyage, and it may be I can persuade you to additional tasks. But in any case I hope you will talk personally with many of my country people, men and women; there is no one so well adapted to make our nations understand each other as a gifted and charming American woman. I have many friends in Paris and before you leave I trust I may be allowed the privilege of presenting at least a few of them to you."

Feeling agreeably flattered, as any woman is flattered by the homage of a clever man, Mrs. Burton was about to reply, when suddenly the tall figure of

Miss Patricia Lord appeared, rising before her like a pillar of darkness.

She gave Monsieur Duval a curt nod; except for this she made no explanation of her presence, continuing standing until the courteous Frenchman felt constrained to offer her his chair.

However, not until he had walked away did she condescend to accept his place and then she managed to sit perfectly upright, which is a *difficult* feat in a reclining chair.

"What is the matter, Aunt Patricia?" Mrs. Burton at once demanded, feeling suddenly disturbed by Miss Patricia's severe expression. "Surely nothing has happened to any one of the Camp Fire girls! I think I have noticed nearly all of them strolling about on deck in the past half hour."

Gloomily Miss Patricia frowned. "I am not here to discuss with you the girls whom you are suppose to be chaperoning. I wish to speak of your conduct, Polly Burton. I have been considering the subject for the past twenty-four hours. Under the circumstances you might as well know *first as last* that I do not approve of your

present intimacy with this unknown Frenchman, this *Mr.* Duval." Miss Patricia scorned the use of the French title. "I have no idea of attempting to pronounce the foolish word the French employ for plain 'Mister.' However, you realize perfectly well that from the day following our sailing you have spent the greater part of your time in his society. Sorry as I am to speak of this, my respect for your husband compels me to warn you——"

Here Aunt Patricia was interrupted by an explosion of laughter as fresh and ingenuous as a girl's.

"My dear Aunt Patricia, really I beg your pardon, but I supposed you were coming with me to France to help me chaperon my Camp Fire girls! I never dreamed of your also feeling obliged to chaperon me. Remember, I am pretty old and never was particularly fascinating, even as a girl. I am afraid you will have a hard time to persuade my husband to jealousy. Richard is the fascinating member of our family! As a matter of fact, I have simply been boring Monsieur

Duval for the past hour by discussing our plan of campaign after we reach France. You don't consider the subject a dangerous one?"

But neither Miss Patricia's face nor figure relaxed.

"I may not be original, Polly Burton; as a matter of fact, I have no idea that you *said* anything of the least importance to your Frenchman. With you it is the old story; it is not *what* you say, but the *way* you say it. I have been watching you and you may pretend to have noticed the Camp Fire girls. However, if you tell the truth, you have not been aware of anything or anybody except Mr. Duval during the entire afternoon.

At this moment Miss Patricia appeared so annoyed and suspicious that it was difficult for Mrs. Burton to decide whether she were the more amused or irritated. However, it made no difference; either attitude would be entirely lost upon Miss Patricia Lord.

"I am sorry you don't approve of me," Mrs. Burton returned with a pretence of

meekness, yet dropping her eyelids to conceal the expression of her eyes.

"It is not that I do not approve of you, Polly, for I so seldom do that," Aunt Patricia replied. "It is that I also feel it *my duty* to recall you to *your* duty. You speak of having lately observed the Camp Fire girls wandering about near you. I feel it an effort to believe this because only a short time ago, while undoubtedly you were enjoying yourself with a foreigner concerning whom you know absolutely nothing, I discovered Sally Ashton seated upon a coil of rope in an obscure portion of this vessel, flirting outrageously with a young American physician. Your niece, Peggy Webster, is walking up and down the lower deck with a French officer; lower deck not the upper, mind you, where she might have been seen by you, although I doubt it. The other girls are——"

By this time Mrs. Burton had become seriously annoyed. She was obliged to remember, of course, that Miss Patricia was a much older woman, yet, neverthe-

less her eyes darkened and her color deepened a little ominously.

"Please Aunt Patricia, you are making a mistake," she began warmly. "I am not in the habit of spying upon my Camp Fire girls and I am sure you will never find such a proceeding necessary."

Then, ashamed of the word she had employed, she continued more gently.

"So you have been making a tour of investigation because you considered that I was neglecting my duty? All I can say, Aunt Patricia, is that you will always discover Sally Ashton flirting if there is an agreeable man in sight. I cannot make up my mind whether or not Sally is unconscious, yet flirting with her is either an instinct, an art, or both. However, every man who sees her immediately succumbs. But as for Peggy, Peggy is an absolutely trustworthy person! Did I not tell you that Peggy considers herself engaged to Ralph Marshall, who is in the aviation service in France at the present time? None of Peggy's family will acknowledge her engagement; we feel she is too young, yet Ralph's parents are old friends of my

sister and brother-in-law. After a time I am sure you will understand the Camp Fire Girls better."

There was undeniably a tone of condescension in Mrs. Burton's voice, and Aunt Patricia sniffed.

"I understand the girls as well as I consider necessary, Polly Burton, and probably better than you do. I have always insisted that you have little knowledge of human nature. As for thinking that a girl of Peggy's age, with almost no experience of life, can have any idea of the character of man she could or should marry——"

But here, realizing that Miss Patricia was mounted upon one of her favorite hobbies and that nothing she could say or do would stop her, Mrs. Burton, pretending to offer a polite attention, in reality allowed her mind to wander.

Miss Patricia was usually antagonistic to all male persons safely past their babyhood. Among her friends it was an open question whether Aunt Patricia had been jilted at an early age, or whether she had never condescended to an admirer.

"All men are idiots," is what she had been known to remark when hard pressed.

Gradually Mrs. Burton allowed herself to slip back in her chair, resting her head more comfortably against a brown velvet cushion.

It was strange that she had felt so little fear of the submarine menace during the present voyage, when she had expected to be fearful the entire way across. There were odd moments at night when one could not sleep, thinking of the possible, even the probable danger that might manifest itself at any moment. But aside from obeying the ship's rules with regard to life belts and lights, the keeping of one's state-room door unlatched, what was there to do save trust in a higher power?

Actually at this moment Mrs. Burton, while presumably listening, was deciding that she was enjoying the very crossing to France she had so much dreaded.

It would never do to shock Aunt Patricia, yet in a number of years she had not met so agreeable a man as the French senator. Moreover, she was entertained by the opportunity to form a new and

stimulating intimacy with a clever woman. Mrs. Bishop, known to her public as Georgianna Bishop, having written several successful novels, was at present traveling to Europe to write of the American soldiers life in the trenches.

In spite of the fact that Miss Patricia seemed also to regard Mrs. Bishop with disfavor, Mrs. Burton had invited her to spend a part of her time in France with them, if it could possibly be arranged.

At this moment, if Miss Patricia would only stop talking, Mrs. Burton believed that she would like to have Mrs. Bishop sit beside her during the hour of afternoon tea.

Tea would be served in a few moments. Perhaps, if Miss Patricia would decide to move, one of the Camp Fire girls would appear to act as messenger and find Mrs. Bishop.

With this thought in mind, glancing carelessly up and down the deck, Mrs. Burton discovered Vera Lagerloff and Bettina Graham coming hurriedly toward her. What was more surprising, they were accompanied by the new friend with

whom she had been talking a few moments before.

Both girls looked so white and frightened that Mrs. Burton, making a hasty movement in attempting to jump up from her chair, found herself entangled in her steamer rug.

As Monsieur Duval endeavored to extricate her, he said quietly:

"I hope we have not alarmed you, but a most unfortunate accident has just occurred on board ship, which I hope may not develop into a tragedy. A young French girl, traveling with the American Red Cross unit, is supposed to have attempted to take her own life. I am by no means sure of this, she may be ill and have fainted from some cause. I was sent for, I presume because of my nationality, then some one suggested you."

But before Monsieur Duval had more than finished speaking, Mrs. Burton was hurrying away, accompanied by Bettina and Vera.

"I really do not know how to explain what has happened," Bettina continued. "You remember the French girl we have

noticed because she appeared so much younger than the other members of her Red Cross unit? It seems that at the beginning of the war all her people were killed and her home in France destroyed, so that she is now entirely alone. She was living with friends in the United States, but suddenly decided that she wished to return to France. Unexpectedly she must have lost her courage. However, all Vera and I really know it what one of the other Red Cross girls told us, asking us to tell no one else."

By the end of Bettina's speech, Mrs. Burton and the two girls had left the deck, and Vera was leading the way down one of the narrow corridors bordered on either side by small state-rooms.

At the door of one of the rooms a woman in the uniform of a Red Cross nurse, after making a little motion to command silence, stepped quietly out.

"There is nothing serious the matter, Mrs. Burton. It was hardly worth while to disturb you. At present the young French girl who was crossing with us to her former home is suffering from an at-

tack of hysteria. As I have not been able to quiet her and as you are here, perhaps you will come and see what you can do."

Then she turned to Vera and Bettina.

"If there is any other story of what has occurred being told on board ship, will you please do your best to contradict it? A ship is a hopeless place for gossip. However, I am afraid Yvonne will scarcely be fit for the work our Red Cross unit expects to undertake. I must find some one to befriend the child after we reach Paris."

Bettina and Vera moved away, followed by the older woman.

At the same instant Mrs. Burton, entering the half open door of the state-room, discovered a young girl of about seventeen or eighteen, with large brown eyes and fair hair, lying huddled on the bed. She was not crying, yet instantly put up her hands before her face as if to escape observation.

Mrs. Burton sat down on the edge of the berth beside her.

CHAPTER V

The Confession

DON'T talk if you prefer not; perhaps you may be able to sleep after a little if I sit here beside you," Mrs. Burton said gently.

"But I would prefer to be alone," the young French girl answered, speaking English with a pretty foreign accent.

Instantly Mrs. Burton rose, intending to leave the tiny state-room; however, having gone but a few steps she heard the the same voice plead:

"No, please don't leave me. I have been watching you and your friends ever since our ship sailed, and as I must talk to some one, I wish it to be you. If you only knew how sorry I am to have created a scene and to have given so much trouble, when everybody has been so kind."

Then the girl began to cry again, but softly as if her desire for tears was nearly spent.

Without replying Mrs. Burton took her former position.

Occasionally she had a moment of thinking that perhaps after her years of experience as a Camp Fire guardian she was beginning to understand something of the utterly unlike temperaments of varying types of girls. Moreover, in spite of Aunt Patricia's judgment, her work had afforded her unusual opportunities for the study of human nature.

Now, as she sat silently watching the young French girl in her effort to regain her self-control, Mrs. Burton realized that hers would be no ordinary story. Her friend had chosen to protect her by stating that she was suffering from an attack of nerves, yet this instant the girl was making an intense effort to gain a fresh hold upon herself both mentally and physically.

"I am sorry," she repeated a moment later, " for I realize now I should never have made the attempt to return home to France, although I thought after nearly three years in the United States surely I had the courage! Still, for the past few days I have been becoming more and more

convinced that I was going to fail, that I had not the strength for the work ahead of me. What you were told just now, that I had merely fainted, was not true. I had made up my mind that since I was not going to be able to be of service to my country I would not add to her burden. I could not do that; there had to be some way out, and I *had* to find the way."

Sitting up, Yvonne now leaned forward, resting her small head with its heavy weight of fair hair upon her hands, clasped under her chin. She was not looking at her companion. Her eyes held an expression which betrays an inner vision.

"I did make an effort to do what you suspect. I wonder if I was wrong? Certainly I was unsuccessful, since I do not even feel ill in consequence. I suppose I ought to explain that I had written a note to apologize for the mistake I had made in urging the Red Cross unit to bring me with them to France and to say I regretted the distress and trouble I must give. Then as I was carrying the letter to the room of the friend whom you found here with me I think I must have

fainted. She was shocked and angry when she learned what I had attempted to do and I have given my word I will not try again." Yvonne was silent for a moment and then added with another catch in her voice: "Do you think it wicked of me, because I am still a little sorry I failed in what I attempted? But I don't think you will when I have told you my history."

Under ordinary circumstances Yvonne's broken and incoherent story would have annoyed Mrs. Burton. She had scant sympathy and could make but slight excuse for the neurotic persons who have no fortitude with which to meet life's inevitable disasters but expend all their energy in compassion for themselves. Especially did she resent this characteristic in a young girl, having grown accustomed to the sanity and the outdoor spirit engendered by the Camp Fire life. Moreover, one has at present no time or pity save for real tragedies.

Yet Yvonne's attitude had not so affected her. Instead she realized that the girl's suffering had been due to a vital

cause and that the secret of her action still remained hidden.

"Had you not better rest and talk to me later?" Mrs. Burton inquired. "I think you are very tired, more so than you realize. After a time perhaps you will see things more clearly. You are young, Yvonne, to believe there is nothing more for you in life that is worth while."

"I know that would be true if these were not war times, Madame," the girl answered. "Will you please listen to my story now? There may be no opportunity at another time."

Slipping out of her berth, Yvonne proffered the one small chair the state-room afforded to her visitor.

"Won't you sit here? You may be more comfortable," she suggested.

Then she found a seat for herself on the lounge which ran along one side of the room.

By this time the little French girl was looking so completely exhausted that Mrs. Burton would have liked again to urge her to wait. Yet after all perhaps it might be a relief to have her confession over!

"I was living in a château with my mother and two brothers when the war began," Yvonne said, going directly to the heart of her story. "After the news came that war was declared and the Germans had invaded our country, my older brother, Andre, left at once to join his regiment near Paris. At that time we did not dream there could be danger near our home, which seemed so far from the front. I do not know whether you have noticed my name on our passenger list, Yvonne Fleury, and our home was called the Château Yvonne. It is not in existence any longer. But I am afraid I am not telling my story clearly. Sometimes I grow confused trying to remember when things actually happened, as they all came quickly and unexpectedly. After my brother and our men servants had gone my mother and I tried to carry on the work at the château as well as we could with only the women to help. We were not rich people; my father had died some years before, soon after my younger brother was born. But we had a good deal of land and a beautiful orchard. It seems

strange to think that even the orchard has been destroyed!"

As Yvonne talked she had a little habit of frowning, almost as if she were doubting the truth of her own story. Nevertheless, however unique and impossible her story might sound to her own ears, stories like hers had grown only too familiar since the outbreak of the war in Europe.

A moment later and she seemed confused, as if scarcely knowing how to take up the threads of her own history. Afterwards she tried to speak more slowly, her voice sounding as if she were worn out both from her recent suffering and from the effort to recount her own and her country's tragedy.

"For weeks after the war started we had almost no news of any kind to tell us what was taking place. My brother could not send us a letter, as all our trains were devoted to carrying our troops. Now and then, when an occasional motor car passed through our village, a soldier or an officer would drop on the roadside an *edition speciale de la Presse.* Perhaps one of the old peasants, picking up the paper, would

bring it to our château. Afterwards a number of them would gather around while either my mother or I read aloud the news. In those first days the news was nearly always sad news."

Then for a little while Yvonne made no effort to continue her story and Mrs. Burton understood her silence.

"As soon as we could, my mother and I organized a little branch of La Croix Rouge in our village and did what we could. We had many people to help and so spent most of our time making bandages from old linen. We were told then that the wounded might be sent back across the Marne to be cared for by us and that our houses must be made ready to use as hospitals. But the wounded were not cared for by us, not in those early weeks of the war. You know what took place, Madame. Our soldiers were defeated; it is now an old story. One night when the battle line was drawing closer and closer to our home we were warned to flee. But my mother could not, would not believe the word when it came and so we waited too long. We had only a farm wagon and an

old horse with which to make our escape, our other horses and car having been requisitioned for the army."

This time, when Yvonne hesitated, Mrs. Burton had a cowardly wish that she would not go on with her story, so easy it was to anticipate what might follow.

In this moment Yvonne lived over again the night in her life she could never forget. Instead of the soft lapping of the waves against the sides of the ship, the young French girl was hearing the booming of guns, the shrieking of shells and the final patter of bullets like a falling rain.

"I would prefer not to tell you anything more in detail, Mrs. Burton," Yvonne afterwards added more calmly than one could have thought possible.

"The night of our attempted escape we were overtaken by the enemy and my little brother was killed; a few days later my mother died of the shock and exposure. I don't know just how things happened. I remember I was alone one night in a woods with a battle going on all around me. Next morning I believe the Germans began a retreat. A French soldier found me and

took me with him to the home of some French people. I think I must have been with them several weeks before I was myself again. Then I learned that our château had been burned and my brother reported killed.

"One day an American friend, who had learned of our family tragedy, came to see me and decided that it would be wiser to take me home to his own family in the United States. I was so dazed and miserable he believed I would be happier there and would sooner learn to forget. Of course after a time I was happier, but of course one can never forget. So at last I persuaded my friends I must be allowed to return to my own country, that I must help my people who were still going through all that I had endured. My friends were opposed to the idea, but because I insisted, at last they gave their consent. Then after our boat sailed I felt I could not go back to France. I was afraid. I remembered the long night in the woods—the German soldiers——"

Mrs. Burton's arms were about the girl.

"Please don't talk any more of the past,

Yvonne. Try to remember, my dear, that the enemy is no longer in the neighborhood of your old home. He has been driven further and further back until some day, please God, the last German soldier shall have disappeared forever from the sacred soil of France.

"Sleep now, I shall sit here beside you. Later I will talk to you about joining my group of girls in France. You are not strong enough for the Red Cross work at present, but a great deal of our work will be among young French girls and you could be of the greatest aid to us if you care to help. Yet there will be time enough later to speak of our Camp Fire plans."

However, when Yvonne had crawled back into her berth, more exhausted than she had realized, Mrs. Burton continued sitting beside her. Then, hoping the sound of her voice might be soothing and in order to help Yvonne to sleep and also because of the power of suggestion, she repeated a Camp Fire verse:

"As fagots are brought from the forest,
Firmly held by the sinews which bind them,
I will cleave to my Camp Fire sisters
Wherever, whenever I find them.

"I will strive to grow strong like the pine tree,
To be pure in my deepest desire;
To be true to the truth that is in me
And follow the Law of the Fire."

CHAPTER VI

A French Farm House on the Field of Honor

"IS the French country more tragic or less so than you anticipated, Vera?" Peggy Webster inquired.

She and Vera Lagerloff were walking along what must once have served as a road, each girl carrying a large, nearly empty basket on her arm.

"Do you mean the actual country?" Vera questioned. "Then, yes, conditions are worse than I expected to find them, certainly in a neighborhood like this, where the work of restoration is only just beginning." She frowned, shaking her head sadly. "I could never have imagined God's earth could be transformed to look like a place of torment, and yet this countryside suggests one of the hells in Dante's 'Inferno.' But if you mean are the French people more tragic than I thought to find them, then a thousand times, no!

Was there ever anything so inspiring or so amazing as their happiness and courage in returning to their old homes? The fact that their homes are no longer in existence seems not to discourage them, now their beloved land has been restored. When we have been working here a longer time I hope I shall recover from my desire to weep each time I see an old man or woman happily engaged in rebuilding one of their ruined huts. It is a wonderful experience, Peggy, this opportunity to appreciate the spiritual bravery of the French people. I hope I may learn a lesson from them. I have needed just such a lesson since Billy's death."

For a moment Peggy Webster made no reply.

The entire countryside through which they were passing lay between the line of the German advance into France at the beginning of the war and the famous Hindenburg line to which the Boches were forced back. The Germans had so devastated the French villages and country, it was as if the plague of the world had swept across them. The valley had also

suffered the bombardment of the enemy and the returning fire from their own guns.

Yet on this winter day the sun was shining brilliantly on the uptorn earth, which once had been so fair, while in a bit of broken shell not far from the road an indomitable sparrow had builded her nest.

There were no shrubs and the trees were gaunt scarred trunks, without branches or leaves, reminding one of an ancient gloomy picture in the old-time family Bible, known as "Dry Bones in the Valley."

"Well, even the French country does not make me sorrowful, not just at present," Peggy replied. "If only the enemy can be forced further back next spring when the expected drive takes place, what a wonderful opportunity for us to be allowed to continue to help with the restoration of the French country. I do not believe many years will be required before the land will be lovely and fruitful again. But then you know I am a tiresome practical person. You don't suppose by any chance this portion of France will ever be

destroyed by the enemy a second time? Yes, I know even such a suggestion sounds like disloyalty and I do not of course believe such a tragedy could occur. Just think, Vera, what only a handful of American women have accomplished here in the Aisne valley! Ten American women have had charge of the rehabilitation of twenty-seven villages and with the aid of the soldiers during their leaves of absence from the trenches have placed five thousand acres of land under cultivation. I hope we make a success of our work, Vera, yet whatever the future holds, we must stick to our posts."

The two Camp Fire girls were walking ankle deep in the winter mud. Where the roads had been cut into furrows by the passing of heavy artillery, miniature streams of melted snow ran winding in and out like the branches of a river. Now and then a gulley across the road would be so deep and wide that one had to make a flying leap to cross safely.

About a quarter of a mile away the Aisne watered the countryside and the towns. Not far off was the classic old

town of Rheims with her ancient Cathedral already partly destroyed. Encircling the landscape was the crown of low hills where not for days but years the tides of battle have surged up and down from victory to defeat, from defeat to victory, until during the winter of 1917 and 1918 there was a lull in the world conflict.

Finally the two girls came in sight of a field. Already a devoted effort was being made to prepare the ground for an early spring plowing. Stray bits of shell, the half of a battered helmet, the butt of a broken gun had been laid in a neat pile, the larger stones had been placed beside them.

Standing in front of a tiny hut which evidently had been partly burned down, were an old man and woman busily at work trying to rebuild their house. A small quantity of new lumber lay on the ground beside them.

"Dear me, I wish I were a carpenter, a mason, a doctor, I don't know what else, and a million times a millionaire, then one might really be useful!" Peggy exclaimed,

as she and Vera stopped to gaze sympathetically at the old couple.

The next instant their attention was also attracted by a child who was sitting near the pile of broken stones and shells nursing something in her arms. At first she did not observe the two American girls, although they were facing her and not many yards away.

Her shock of dark hair looked as if it had been cut from her head in the darkness, she had large unhappy black eyes and a thin, haggard face.

Finally discovering the two older girls, with an unexpected cry of terror, she made a flying leap toward the house, still clasping her broken doll, and hid herself inside.

At the child's cry the man and woman also turned as if they too were frightened and yet unable to flee. For an instant Vera and Peggy saw in their faces a suggestion of what they all too recently had endured. The next moment the old peasants were bowing and smiling with unfailing politeness.

"Do you think we might speak to them, Vera?" Peggy inquired. "Of course we

do not wish to be obtrusive, but I have a few groceries which I did not give away in the village still remaining in my basket. It is possible they might find them useful. How glad I am Yvonne Fleury is living with us! Already she has taught me more than I could ever learn in any other way about the French people, their gentleness, their infinite industry and patience and above all their beautiful manners. I hope no one of them will ever feel any American tries to help in a spirit of patronage; as for myself, each day I pray for a fresh gift of tact."

Vera started forward.

"Come with me, Peggy, I think I can persuade the two old people to realize we only wish to be helpful. You see, my own people were Russian peasants and there ought to be a bond of sympathy between us. It is true the French earned their liberty over a century ago, while our liberty yet hangs in the balance, now that German autocracy is trying to replace the Russian. I believe I am a better carpenter than these old people; if they are friendly I intend to ask them to allow me to return

to assist them with their work tomorrow."

Afterwards for ten or fifteen minutes the two girls remained talking happily with their new acquaintances.

Like many other Americans, both Vera and Peggy had firm faith in their knowledge of the French language until their arrival in France. Assuredly they could understand each other perfectly as well as other Americans and English friends who spoke French slowly and deliberately. But unfortunately the French folk apparently speak with greater rapidity than any other nation on the face of the earth and with a wealth of idioms and unexpected intonations, leaving the foreigner who has never lived in France floundering hopelessly in pursuit of their meaning.

In contrast with their other new French acquaintances the two American girls now found the old peasant and his wife a real satisfaction. Their vocabularies were not large and they spoke in a halting, simple fashion not difficult to translate.

Their story was not unlike the story of thousands of other families in the stricken regions of France. During the period of

victory the Germans had been quartered in the nearby village, but as the village was not large and the soldiers were numerous, a few of them had been sent to live with the small peasant farmers not far from the town. They were ordered not only to live upon them, but also to secure whatever livestock they owned, or whatever food of value.

Père and Mère Michét had possessed a daughter and a son-in-law. The son they thought still alive and fighting for France. Their daughter, Marguerite Michét, had disappeared.

"La petite Marguerite, she has never been herself since her mother was taken," Mère Michét explained. "I tell her always *la bonne mère* will return, but she is afraid of strangers; you will pardon her?"

When at last the girls had been permitted to leave their small offerings and had started toward their new home, Vera had agreed to return next day to render what assistance she could toward the restoration of the little house. Peggy was to come back in order to persuade the little French

girl to make friends and perhaps pay them a visit at the farm.

After walking on for a short added distance, both girls finally reached their own French farm house.

It was now late afternoon and the old battered building appeared homely and forbidding. Once upon a time, with the French love of color, the farm house had been painted a bright pink, but now the color had been washed off, as if tears had rolled down the face of some poor old painted lady, smearing her faded cheeks. A fire had evidently been started when the Germans began their retreat, which for some freakish reason had died down after destroying only the rear portion of the building.

After the arrival of the Camp Fire unit in France the entire party had gone straight to Paris as they planned, where their credentials had been presented to the proper authorities, as well as a brief outline of the work which they hoped to be allowed to undertake. Their idea was at once so simple and so practical that no objection was raised.

The Camp Fire unit looked forward to establishing a community farm in one of the ruined districts of France. So after a short stay in Paris, following the advice of the American Committee, Mrs. Burton and Aunt Patricia set out to find a home for their unit. Later the Camp Fire girls joined them at the old farm house on the Aisne.

Only a little time had passed, nevertheless the farm already suggested home.

As Peggy and Vera entered the open space where a gate had once stood, they discovered the entire Camp Fire community outside in the yard.

As usual, Aunt Patricia was giving orders to everybody in sight, while Mrs. Burton in her effort to be of assistance as she urged the others not to attempt too much, was fluttering about, as often as not in the way.

As a matter of fact, the Camp Fire girls were paying but little attention either to her or to Aunt Patricia. Mary Gilchrist, a few moments before, having driven her motor into the farm yard, the girls were at present helping her to unload.

After crossing to France with the Sunrise Camp Fire Unit, Mary had become so much one of them that she had concluded to remain with them for a time, certainly until she could find more useful work. Therefore her motor and her services were temporarily at their disposal.

It is amazing what women and girls are accomplishing these days without masculine aid, and whether or not this is a fortunate state of affairs, the war has left no choice.

Since they were both strong and energetic, Vera and Peggy were glad to have reached home at so critical a moment. However, the other girls were getting on quite comfortably without their aid. Bettina and Alice Ashton, having placed a plank at the end of the car, managed so that the large boxes and packing cases could slide onto the ground without being lifted. Nearly every box of any size bore the name of "Miss Patricia Lord."

Finally, "Gill," for the Camp Fire girls were by this time calling Mary Gilchrist by her diminutive title, as she seemed to

prefer it, standing up on the seat of her motor, began signaling for attention.

"Be quiet for a moment everybody, please, and listen as diligently as you can. I am not a magician, nor yet a ventriloquist, yet if you will be perfectly silent you will think I am one or both.

The next instant and Mary's audience became aware of an extraordinary combination of familiar noises proceeding from the depths of her motor. One felt like a guest at a "mad tea-party", although of a different nature from Alice's. The noises were a mingled collection of squawks and cackles and crowing, and pitched in a considerably lower key, a rich but unmistakable grunt.

Alone Aunt Patricia appeared gratified, almost exultant.

Stepping over toward the car with her long, militant stride, she gave her commands briefly.

"Here, Vera, you have more brains than the other girls, help me to move these crates. Polly Burton considered it possible to run a community farm without a farm animal within twenty miles. But

then she was not brought up on a small place in Ireland where we kept the pig in the parlor!" And here Miss Patricia's rich Irish brogue betrayed her cheerfulness for she only gave sway to her Irish pronounciation in moments of excitement.

The next moment, not only with Vera's but also with Peggy's and Alice Ashton's aid, the four women dragged forward a large wooden box with open slats containing a noble collection of fowls, then another of geese and ducks. Finally with extreme caution they engineered the landing of a crate which had been the temporary home of a comfortable American hog and her eugenic family.

"Good gracious, Aunt Patricia, how did you ever manage to acquire such valuable possessions?" Mrs. Burton demanded.

"By ordering them shipped from my own farm in Massachusetts a month or more before we sailed for France and then by forwarding my address to the proper persons after we landed here," Miss Patricia answered calmly. Ignoring any

further assistance, she began opening a box which was filled with grain.

"I presume other things have arrived for me as well, Mary Gilchrist?" Miss Patricia questioned.

Mary nodded and laughed. She looked very fetching in her motor driver's costume of khaki with the short skirt and trousers and the Norfolk jacket belted in military fashion. On her hair, which had ruddy red brown lights in it, she wore a small military hat deeply dented in the center.

"Goodness gracious, Aunt Patricia, dozens of things!" she replied. "You must have chartered an entire steamer to bring over your gifts to the French nation. Best of all, there are two beautiful cows waiting for you in Soissons at this moment. I could not bring them in the motor, nor did I dare invite them to amble along behind my car. But I have arranged with an old man in the town to escort the cows out to our place tomorrow, or as soon as possible."

No one did anything but stare at Miss Patricia for the next few seconds.

Whether or not this condition of affairs made her unusually self-conscious, or whatever the reason, finally she rested from her labor of opening boxes to gaze first at Mrs. Burton and then slowly from one girl's face to the other's.

"I don't mean to add to your burdens by asking any one of you to assist me in running my farm," she began in a tone which might have been considered apologetic had it emanated from any one than Aunt Patricia. "I intend to find an old man to help and to do the rest myself."

Then a peculiar expression crossed the rugged old face.

"You see, I was raised on a tiny farm in Ireland and used sometimes to know what it meant to be hungry until my brother came over to the United States and made a fortune in ways I am more or less ashamed to remember. I have been telling Polly Burton that I crossed over to France because I wished to look after her and also to help her care for you girls. But that was not the whole truth. I think I came largely because I could not sleep in my bed of nights knowing how many old

people and babies there were in this devil-ridden portion of France who were hungry. Oh, there are many people as well as the governments interested in keeping the soldiers well fed! Maybe it's a crime these days for the old and for babies to require food! Yet they do need it. So if you don't mind, Polly, I want the people in our neighborhood to feel that they can come to our farm for milk and eggs, or whatever we have to give them. I left word with the manager of my farm near Boston to ship livestock to me in France whenever the chance offers. I am hoping after a little, when these old people get back on their farms that we may be able to give each family sufficient stock to keep them going until their young men and women return home. But remember, I don't wish to interfere with what you children are doing, nursing the sick and opening schools and starting play centers. Heaven only knows what you are not undertaking! As I said before, I'll just look after my farm."

Here Miss Patricia attempted to return to her usual belligerent manner, but found

it difficult because Mrs. Burton had placed her arm about her. Try as Aunt Patricia might to conceal her adoration of Mrs. Burton, it was nearly always an impossible feat.

Besides Mrs. Burton was exclaiming with a little catch in her voice:

"You dear, splendid, old Irish gentlewoman! Is there anybody in the world in the least like you? Of course you were right when you announced that I never would think of the really practical things we should require for our work over here. But, although I spent as much money as I could possibly afford, I have realized every day since our arrival, that if I had expended every cent I ever hope to possess, it would have amounted to nothing. Yet I never once thought of the shipping of stock for the little farms in our neighborhood, Aunt Patricia. I am sure you will make life more worth while for every man and woman in this part of the French country before many months."

Instead of appearing gratified by these compliments, Miss Patricia was heard to murmur something or other about Polly

Burton's fashion of exaggeration. Then, perhaps partly to conceal embarrassment, she began tearing the slats from the side of one of her crates. Afterwards, driving her travel-worn flock of chickens toward the chicken house, which she herself had made ready, and shooing them with her black skirt, Miss Patricia temporarily disappeared.

Through tears Mrs. Burton laughed at the picture.

Vera followed Miss Patricia, whom she had learned to like and admire since the afternoon of their extraordinary introduction.

"I hope to be allowed to help with the farm work, Aunt Patricia," she urged. "You know I too was brought up on Mr. Webster's farm in New Hampshire, besides, all my people in Russia were peasant farmers."

Miss Patricia did not cease for an instant to continue to care for her brood. However, she did answer with unusual condescension:

"You are a sensible girl, Vera. I observed the fact on the afternoon I met you

in New York City when you made no effort to argue with me in connection with the escape of that ridiculous burglar."

CHAPTER VII

Becoming Adjusted

IT was not a simple matter for the Sunrise Camp Fire unit to become accustomed to their new life in the devastated French country. The conditions were primitive and difficult. More than once in the first few weeks Mrs. Burton wondered if in bringing the Camp Fire girls with her to work in France hers had not been the courage of folly?

Yet they started out with excellent military discipline. Life at the farm house was modeled upon the precepts of the "Waacs," the Womans' Army Auxiliary Corps of the British army in France. These girls, many thousands in number, are performing every possible service behind the British armies in the field.

Unexpectedly it was Sally Ashton who first demanded that a proper routine of life and work be laid down and obeyed. Also the household work must be equitably

divided, each girl choosing her portion according to her tastes and talents.

Each day's calendar, written by Mrs. Burton upon her typewriter, was hung in a conspicuous place in the front hall at the French farm.

The domestic schedule read:

"Breakfast 8 o'clock, bedrooms cleaned immediately after. Dinner 1 P. M. Supper 6.30 P. M. No work after 8.30 P. M. Bedtime 10 o'clock."

In the proper observance of the hours for meals Sally Ashton was particularly interested, as she had volunteered to undertake the direction of the housekeeping, which consisted of deciding upon the menu of the simple meals and assisting in their preparation. It was not possible that Sally alone should do all the cooking for so large a family without wearing herself out and leaving no time for other things.

However, soon after their arrival Mrs. Burton had secured the services of an old French woman whom she had discovered wandering about the country homeless, her little hut having been entirely destroyed

by the Germans. Not knowing what else to do, Mrs. Burton originally invited her to live with them at the farm temporarily. But she had proved such a help in getting settled and the girls had become so fond of her that no one of them willingly would have allowed Mère Antoinette to depart.

After the wonderful fashion of French cooks, Mère Antoinette could make nourishing and savory dishes out of almost nothing, so she and Sally had principal charge of the kitchen. Notwithstanding, two of the Camp Fire Girls were to prepare supper each evening, so that they should not forget their accomplishments and in order to relieve the others.

Marie, Mrs. Burton's maid, had accompanied her to France, although none too willingly. It was not that she did not adore her afflicted country, but because she feared the dangers of the crossing and the hardships she might be forced to endure.

Marie, alas! was a patriot of a kind each country produces, a patriot of the lips, not of the heart or hand.

It must be confessed that she had wan-

dered far from her chosen work as maid to a celebrated American actress. Would any one have dreamed in those early days when Marie had first entered her service that Mrs. Burton would have followed so eccentric a career as she had wilfully chosen in the past few years? First to wander about the United States, living outdoors in Camp Fire fashion with a group of young girls, then with the same group of girls and two additional ones to undertake the present reclamation work in France!

Having accomplished the journey across the sea in safety, Marie would cheerfully, yes, enthusiastically have remained in Paris, even if it were a Paris unlike the gay city she remembered. She would have enjoyed accompanying her "Madame" to the homes of distinguished persons, caring in the meantime for her wardrobe and urging her to return to her rightful place upon the stage. But since Mrs. Burton for the present would do none of these things and since Marie had refused positively to be separated, once more she had to make the best of a bad bargain.

So voluntarily Marie offered to take charge of the greater part of the housework and to devote the rest of her time to sewing for the French children in their vicinity, whose clothes were nothing but an odd assortment of rags.

Marie had her consolations. It was good to be out of a country which produced men of the type of Mr. Jefferson Simpson, who having *once* proposed marriage and been declined, had not the courtesy to renew his suit. Also it was good to speak one's own tongue again, and although at present there were but few men to be seen in the neighborhood under sixty, there were military hospitals in the nearby villages. Moreover, there was always the prospect of the return of some gallant French *poilu* for his holiday from the trenches. So Marie was unable to feel entirely wretched even while undergoing the hardships of an existence within a half-demolished farm house on the Aisne.

As a matter of fact, the old farm house was not in so unfortunate a condition as the larger number of French homes, which

had been wrecked by the enemy before he began his "strategic retreat."

Only a portion of the left wing of the house had been demolished.

This had comprised a large kitchen, a pantry and the dining room. However, a sufficiently large amount of space remained for the uses of the Camp Fire unit.

In the center the house was divided by a long hall. On one side were two comfortably large rooms. The back one was chosen for the dining room and the front for the living room. The pantry was restored so that it could serve for the kitchen; as the old stove had been destroyed, a new one was ordered from Paris. This developed into a piece of good fortune, as it required far less fuel than the old, and fuel was one of the greatest material problems in France, coal selling at this time for $120 a ton.

A single long room occupied the other side of the hall; this room had a high old-fashioned ceiling and was paneled in old French oak as beautiful as if it had adorned a French palace.

Mère Antoinette explained that the

farm house had been the property of Madame de Mauprais, a wealthy French woman who had lived in the château not far away. It had been occupied by her son, who had chosen to experiment in scientific farming for the benefit of the small peasant farmers in the neighborhood.

The war had banished Monsieur de Mauprais and whatever family he may have possessed, so that Mrs. Burton had been able to rent his farm for a small sum through an agent who lived in the nearest village.

It is possible that the farm house had been spared in a measure by the German soldiers because of their greater pleasure in the destruction of the old château which was only about half a mile away. At the present time the château appeared only as a mass of fallen stone.

This single spacious room the Camp Fire girls chose for their school room for the French children in the neighborhood.

The better furniture of the farmhouse had been hacked into bits of wood by the German soldiers and was fit only for burn-

ing. The simple things had not been so destroyed. Fortunately their camping life out of doors had accustomed this particular group of American girls to exercising ingenuity, so that the problem of furnishing and making attractive their school room with so little to go upon rather added to their interest.

Two long planks raised upon clothes-horses discovered in the barn formed a serviceable table. Stools and odd chairs were brought down from the attic. On the floor were two Indian rugs Mrs. Burton had induced the Indian woman near the Painted Desert in Arizona to weave for her with the special Camp Fire design, the wood-gatherer's, the fire-maker's and the torch-bearer's insignia, inserted in the chosen shades of brown, flame color, yellow and white.

On the walls hung a few Camp Fire panels and the coverings of sofa cushions and some outdoor photographs of the Sunrise Camp during former camping experiences which the girls had brought over with them.

Besides these larger articles, they had

managed to store away in their trunks the materials necessary for the regulation Camp Fire work, honor beads and the jewelry indicating the various orders in the Camp Fire. If they were to interest French girls in the movement, they must have the required paraphernalia.

But the school at the farm house was not primarily a place where the French girls of the neighborhood were only to be interested in Camp Fire ideas. It was also a practical school.

During the past year Marta Clark had been studying kindergarten.

She, with Yvonne to help her, had charge of the tiny French children whom they were able to persuade to come daily to the big farm house. They were such starved, pathetic children, some of them almost babies! Yet they had been through so much suffering, their eyes had looked upon such hideous sights, that many of them were either nervous wrecks or else stupefied.

Surely there could be no better service to France than this effort to bring back to

her children a measure of their natural happiness!

Yvonne and Marta devised wonderful games in one end of the big school room. At midday Vera and Peggy always appeared with a special luncheon for their small guests and for the older ones as well. Bettina Graham and Alice Ashton took charge of the older pupils, and in teaching it appeared that Alice at last had found her metier.

Vera and Peggy also worked at the farming out of doors.

More important than any other of Miss Patricia Lord's gifts to the community farm and the surrounding country was a motor tractor, which one day had rolled unconcernedly into the farm house yard, an ugly giant, proving of as much future value to the poor farmers in the neighborhood as any good giant of the ancient fairy tales.

Fortunately Mary Gilchrist was able to explain its use to the French peasants who had never seen the like before, and to show them how speedily their devastated

land might again be turned into plowed fields.

Vera and Peggy made frequent trips to the nearby villages, gaining the friendship of the country people, inviting the younger ones to their farm and helping in whatever ways they could. Now and then Sally Ashton went with them and sometimes Sally played with the smallest of the children, but nearly always her interests were domestic.

In contrast, Mary Gilchrist never remained in the house an hour if it were possible to be away. Besides engineering the tractor and being a general express delivery for the entire neighborhood, she had formed the habit of motoring into Soissons, which was one of the large towns nearby, and offering her services and the use of her car to the hospitals. Occasionally she spent days at a time driving invalided soldiers either from one hospital to another, or else in taking them out on drives for the fresh air and entertainment.

It would therefore appear as if each member of the Sunrise Camp Fire unit had arranged her life with the idea of

being useful in the highest degree, except the Camp Fire guardian.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Burton often used to say that she found no especial reason for her presence at the farm now that Aunt Patricia had become the really important and authoritative guardian. Nevertheless, with that rare quality of personality which as a girl Polly O'Neill had infused into every interest of her life, there was nothing which took place at the farm or in the neighboring country which she did not in a measure inspire.

Once their household had been adjusted, it was true Mrs. Burton did not do a great deal of the actual work. Instead, and oftentimes alone, she wandered from one end of the French countryside to the other, occasionally returning so late to the farm that Aunt Patricia would be found waiting for her at the front door in a state of fear and indignation.

Nevertheless the country people began to watch and wait for her coming.

After a time she brought newspapers with her. Then they began to gather together in one of the larger huts to listen

while she read aloud the war news, with not always a perfectly correct French accent, and yet one they could understand.

When they were weary of the reading she used to talk, speaking always of the day when France would be free and the invader driven beyond her boundaries, never to return. And among her audience were a few of the old peasants who could recall the Franco-Prussian war.

How amazingly these talks cheered the old men and women! Actually the daily round of toil once more became worth while, so near seemed the return of Victor and Hugo and Etienne. They would be happy to find the little homes restored and the fields green that had been drenched in blood.

Occasionally Mrs. Burton made her audience laugh until the tears ran down their wrinkled faces with funny stories of the trenches, of their own *poilus,* and the British Tommies and the new American Sammees.

Never had the great actress used her talent to a better purpose.

At least it gained for her from these

simple and almost heart broken peasants the eternal tribute of laughter and tears.

Her greatest triumph was when Grand'mère, one of the oldest women in the little village of M—, was at last persuaded to pour forth her story.

In more than three years she had not spoken except to answer "Yes" or "No," or now and then to make known her simple needs, not since the Germans carried off her granddaughter, Elsie. Elsie was the acknowledged beauty and belle of the countryside and engaged to marry Captain François Dupis, who was fighting with his regiment at Verdun.

Mrs. Burton had gotten into the habit of stopping at Grand'mère's tiny hut, which her neighbors had restored. At first she brought the old woman little gifts of food in which she seemed not to take the least interest. Now and then she talked to her, although the old woman seldom replied except to nod her head with grave courtesy.

Then one day without any warning as Mrs. Burton was standing near, Grand'mère drew her new friend down into her

lap and poured out her heart-broken story. It left the younger woman ill and shaken.

Afterwards returning late to the farm alone and entirely unafraid, so completely had the country people become her friend, Mrs. Burton wondered what had given the French nation its present faith and courage. Nothing approaching it has the world ever before witnessed! Then she recalled that having paid so dearly for their freedom in those mad days of the revolution, the French people would never again relinquish the supreme gift of human liberty.

CHAPTER VIII

The Old Chateau

ONE afternoon the French farm house was deserted except for Sally Ashton, Mère 'Toinette and Miss Patricia.

As a matter of fact, Miss Patricia was not in the house, but in the farm yard which was separated from the house by a newly planted kitchen garden. It was here that she spent the greater part of her time working far more diligently than if she had been engaged for a few dollars a week. Yet in Massachusetts Miss Patricia Lord's three-hundred-acre farm was one of the prides of the state. In ordinary times she was accustomed to employing from twenty-five to fifty men, although always Miss Patricia acted as her own overseer.

As she had announced, for the present she had managed to secure the services of an old French peasant, nearer seventy

years of age than sixty, to act as her assistant. But Jean was possessed of a determination of character only equaled by Miss Patricia's. Not a word of any language did he know except French, while Miss Patricia's French was one of the mysteries past finding out. Also Jean was nearly stone deaf. This misfortune really served as an advantage in his relation with Miss Patricia, as he never did anything at the time or in the way she ordered him to do it, there was consolation in the thought that he had not understood the order. Jean had his own ideas with regard to farming matters and an experience which had lasted through more than half a century.

Therefore with the assistance of Peggy and Vera the outdoor work on the Sunrise Camp Fire farm was progressing with surprising success. The supply of livestock had been increased by a second shipment from the United States. This shipment Miss Patricia had divided with her French neighbors.

Beside old Jean there was at this time another rebel in Miss Patricia's camp,

Sally Ashton. The other girls were frequently annoyed by the old lady, nevertheless, appreciating her gallant qualities and for the sake of their Camp Fire guardian, they usually agreed to her demands when it was impossible to evade them. But Sally was not fond of doing *anything* she was told to do. Not that Sally was disagreeable, and it was not in her nature to argue, she simply ignored either suggestions or commands, always pursuing her own sweet way.

This afternoon, for example, several of the girls had invited her to walk with them to one of the French villages. Once a week they distributed loaves of bread and a few grocery supplies to the neediest of the peasants, those who had been unable to rebuild their huts or find regular occupation. Sally had declined with entire frankness. She had done her duty by making the bread for the others to give away and more successfully than any one of the girls could have made it. She disliked long, fatiguing walks.

Mrs. Burton had gone off alone on one of her dramatic pilgrimages.

Mary Gilchrist had again motored into Soissons and Sally would have enjoyed accompanying her. To have driven about through the French country with convalescent soldiers would have been extremely entertaining. But Mary had not asked her, preferring to take Yvonne, whom the American girls all appeared to adore.

So in consequence Sally was vexed and a little jealous.

Observing the others depart and that apparently Sally had nothing of importance to occupy her, Miss Patricia had ordered her to come out into the yard and help with the young chickens. They seemed to be afflicted with some uncomfortable moulting disease.

To this invitation Sally had made no reply. She especially disliked foolish, feathery outdoor things and had no intention of sacrificing her well-earned leisure. The school had a semi-weekly half holiday and for once the house was quiet.

Yet after a little more than an hour of leisure, Sally found herself bored. Many times of late she had missed her old friendship with Gerry Williams, since this was

her first Camp Fire experience without Gerry, who had married Felipe Morris the summer before in California.

At least Gerry occasionally had been frivolous! Certainly these were war times and yet could one be serious forever and ever, without an intermission? The other Camp Fire girls now and then got upon Sally's nerves.

As she was seldom warm enough these days, covered with her steamer blanket Sally had been curled up on the bed in her room which she shared with her sister. First she had taken a short nap and then attempted to read a French novel which she had discovered in the attic of the farm. The French puzzled her and it was tiresome to have to consult a dictionary. So Sally lay still for a few moments listening to Mère 'Toinette singing the Marseillaise in a cracked old voice as she went about her work downstairs.

Finally, stretching in a characteristically indolent fashion, Sally rose and walked over to a window. She could only see through one small opening. All the glass in the countryside had been smashed

by the terrific bombardments, and as there was no glass to be had for restoring the windows, glazed paper had been pasted over the frames. The one small aperture had been left for observation of climate and scenery.

Even without her birdseye view, Sally was conscious that the sun was shining brilliantly. A long streak had shone through the glazed paper and lay across her bed.

She decided that she might enjoy a short walk. She really had forgotten Mrs. Burton's suggestion that no one of the girls leave the farm alone and had no thought of deliberately breaking an unwritten law.

Mère 'Toinette and Sally had become devoted friends and also there was an unspoken bond of sympathy between her and Jean, expressed only by the way in which the old man looked at her and in certain dry chucklings in his throat and shakings of his head.

As Sally was about to leave the front door suddenly Mère 'Toinette appeared, to present her with a little package of freshly baked fruit muffins. Sally's appetite in

war times, when everybody was compelled to live upon such short rations, was a standing household joke and one which she deeply resented. Mère 'Toinette resented the point of view equally, preferring Sally to any one of the other girls, and also it was her idea that the good things of this world are created only for the young. There was no measure to her own self-sacrifice.

A few yards beyond the house Sally discovered old Jean, who was doubtless coming to find her, as he bore in his hand a French fleur-de-lis, the national wild flower, which he had found growing in a field as hardy and unconquerable as the French spirit.

Sally accepted his offering with the smile of gratitude which seemed always a sufficient reward for her many masculine admirers.

With Mère 'Toinette's gift in her Camp Fire knapsack and with Jean's flower thrust into her belt, Sally then made a fresh start. She had not thought of going far, as the roads and fields were in too disagreeable a condition.

Pausing about an eighth of a mile from the farm house, she considered whether after all it were worth while to remain out of doors. Even if the afternoon were enchanting, walking through the heavy upturned soil was unpleasant.

Then by accident Sally chanced to observe the ruins of the old French château shining under the rays of the winter sun.

It was not far away and suddenly she made up her mind to go upon an exploring tour. Half a dozen times in the past few weeks the Camp Fire girls had discussed paying a visit to the château to see what interesting discoveries they might unearth among the ruins. But no one of them had so far had the opportunity.

Ordinarily Sally Ashton was the least experimental of the entire group of girls. Instinctively, as a type of the feminine, home-staying woman, she disliked the many adventurous members of her own sisterhood. With not a great deal of imagination, Sally's views of romance were practical and matter of fact. Young men fell in love with one and she had no idea of how many lovers one might have

and no thought of limiting the number so far as she was personally concerned. Then among the number one selected the man who would make the most comfortable and agreeable husband, married him, had children and was happy ever afterwards. So you see, a romance which might bring sorrow as well as happiness had no place in Sally Ashton's practical scheme of life.

Therefore the fates must have driven her to the old French château on this winter afternoon.

The walk itself occupied about half an hour. Around the château in times past there had been a moat. For their own convenience the German troops quartered at the old place had left the bridge over the moat undisturbed, else Sally would never have hazarded a dangerous crossing.

The house had been built of gray stone and it was difficult to imagine how the enemy had managed so completely to reduce it to ruins. An explosion of dynamite must have been employed, for the château appeared to have fallen as if it had been destroyed by an earthquake.

THE FIGURE WAS THAT OF A YOUNG SOLDIER.

Certain portions of the outer walls remained standing, but the towers in the center had caved in upon the interior of the house.

As Sally drew near she felt a little desolate and yet she was not frightened, although a proverbial coward.

The place appeared too abandoned to fear that any living thing could be in its vicinity. It was only that one felt the pity of the destruction of this ancient and beautiful home.

The waste and confusion of war troubled Sally as it does all women. So hard it is to see why destruction is necessary to the growth and development of human history!

Wondering what had become of the French family who formerly had lived in the château before the outbreak of the war, Sally walked up closer to the ruins. From a space between two walls, forming an insecure arch, a bird darted out into the daylight. Not ordinarily influenced by the beauties of nature or by unexpected expressions of her moods, nevertheless Sally uttered a cry of enchantment.

Between the walls she had spied the ruins of an old French drawing room. The bird must have flown through the opening into the room and then quickly out again into the sunshine.

A little table remained standing with an open book upon it, laid face down. There was a rug on the floor, now thick with mould, and yet it was a rare Aubusson rug with sturdy cupids trailing flowery vines across its surface. There were pieces of broken furniture and bric-a-brac strewn over the floor.

Sally must have continued staring inside the room for several moments before she slowly became aware that there was a human figure seated in a chair in the shadow near one of the half fallen walls.

The figure was that of a young soldier. He was asleep when Sally discovered him and incredibly dirty. His hair was long and matted, hanging thick over his forehead. One arm was wrapped in a soiled bandage.

Yet Sally did not feel frightened, only faint and ill for an instant from pity.

Coming to their farm house after a few

days in Paris, Sally had seen trains filled with wounded soldiers. In Paris she also had noticed blinded and invalided men being led along the streets by their families or friends, yet never so piteous a figure as this.

CHAPTER IX

A Mystery

SALLY'S little cry of astonishment must have awakened the soldier.

The terror on his face when he first beheld her took away any thought of fear from the girl. Besides it was all too strange! Why should he, a soldier, be afraid, and of her? And why should he be in hiding in this queer tumble-down old place? For he *was* in hiding, there was no doubt of this from his furtive manner.

Some instinct in Sally, or perhaps the fact that she had seen so much hunger since her arrival in this portion of France, made her immediately take out her little package of bread which Mère 'Toinette had given her and thrust it forward.

She was standing framed in the arch made by the two fallen walls, not having moved since the moment of her amazing discovery.

The soldier's hunger was greater than

his fear, for he almost snatched the food from Sally's hands and, as he ate it she could not bear watching him. There is something dreadful in the sight of a human being ravenously hungry.

Afterwards, when he did not speak, Sally found herself making the first remarks, and unconsciously and stupidly, not realizing what she was doing at the moment, she spoke in English.

The next instant, to her surprise, the soldier replied in the same tongue, although it seemed to Sally that he spoke with a foreign accent, what the accent was she did not know. Sally had not a great deal of experience, neither was she particularly clever.

"What are you doing here?" is what she naturally inquired.

The soldier hesitated and placed his hand to his forehead, looking at the girl dazedly.

"Why am I hiding here?" he repeated. Then almost childishly he went on: "I am hiding, hiding because no one must find me, else I would be shot at once. I

don't know how long I have been here alone. I am very cold."

"But I don't understand your reason," Sally argued. "Why don't you find some one to take care of you? You cannot be living here; besides you could not have been here long without food or water or you would have died."

"But I have had a little food and water," the soldier replied. "I found a few cans of food in a closet and there is water in one of the rooms."

His voice had a complaining note which was an expression of suffering if one had understood. Then his face was feverish and wretched.

"But you don't look as if you had used much water," Sally remarked in her usual matter-of-fact fashion. She had a way of pursuing her own first idea without being influenced by other considerations.

"It is hard work when one's arm is like this," the soldier returned fretfully.

Again Sally surveyed the soiled bandage with disfavor. Apparently it had not been changed in many days, since it was encrusted with dirt and blood and

having slipped had been pulled awkwardly back into place.

Tempermentally, Sally Ashton hated the sight of blood and suffering. In the years of the Camp Fire training she had been obliged to study first aid, but she had left the practical application to the other girls. Her own tastes were domestic and she therefore had devoted her time to domestic affairs.

Now something must be done for the soldier whose presence in the old château and whose behavior were equally puzzling, and as there was no one else, Sally had no idea of shirking the immediate task. In her Camp Fire kit she always carried first aid supplies.

"If you will go to the room where you found the water and wash your arm as thoroughly as you can I will put on a fresh bandage for you," she offered. "Don't argue and don't be long, for something simply has to be done for you, you are in such a dreadful condition."

Even in the midst of feeling a little like Florence Nightingale, Sally preserved a due amount of caution. She had no idea

of wandering about a tumble-down château with a strange soldier. In reality she was not so much afraid of him as of the house itself. She had the impression that the walls were ready to topple down and bury her.

When the soldier did not move, Sally beckoned him imperiously toward the open arch where she had remained standing just outside the walls.

"You are to come here, while I take off the old bandage. No one will see you and I am afraid to enter so dangerous a place."

The man obeyed, and Sally cut away the soiled linen, trying not to get too distinct an impression of the wound underneath. Yet what she saw alarmed her sufficiently, for she knew enough to realize that the wound required more scientific treatment than she felt able to give. "Now go and wash your arm," she directed, and without a word he went off.

During the ten minutes her self-imposed patient remained away, Sally seriously considered his puzzling situation and determined upon the advice she would offer.

In the first place, so far he had given her no explanation for his conduct.

Why was he in concealment? The possibility that the soldier might have committed a wrong which made it incumbent that he hide from justice did not occur to Sally. She simply determined that they would discuss the subject to some satisfactory end on his return.

The young man did look much better, having made an effort to cleanse his face as well as his wound, but as Sally took hold of his hand before beginning her task, she was startled to discover that he was suffering from a fever through neglect of his injury. This made her the more determined. Although appreciating her own inefficiency and disliking the work, there was nothing to be done at present but to go ahead with her own simple first-aid treatment. She had a bottle of antiseptic and clean surgical gauze.

As she wound the bandage, wishing she had taken the trouble to learn the art more skilfully, Sally announced:

"You must see a physician about your arm as soon as possible. You never have

explained to me why you are hiding here. But in any case you cannot remain when you are ill and hungry and cold and require a great deal of attention. You must go into one of the villages to a hospital. While you were away I have been thinking what to do. You look to me too ill to walk very far and, as I am living not more than half a mile away, I will go back to our farm and tell my friends about you. Later I think I can arrange to come back for you in a motor and then we will drive you to one of the hospitals. I don't know as much about the French hospitals as my friends do, but of course everybody is anxious to do whatever is possible for the Allied soldiers."

Sally placed a certain amount of stress on the expression "Allied soldiers", but never for an instant believing in the possibility that her patient could belong to an enemy nationality.

"If you tell anyone you have discovered me here in hiding, it will be the last of me," the soldier declared.

By this time Sally was beginning to be troubled. Why did the young man look

and speak so strangely? He seemed confused and worried and either unable to explain his actions, or else unwilling. Yet somehow one had the impression that he was a gentleman and there need be no fear of any lack of personal courtesy.

It was possible from his appearance to believe that he might be suffering from a mental breakdown. Sally recalled that many of the soldiers were affected in this way from shell shock or the long strain of battle.

"I suppose I must tell you something. In any case, I have to trust my fate in your hands and I know there is not one person in a thousand who would spare me. I was a prisoner and escaped from my captors. I don't know how I discovered this old house. I don't know how long I have been wandering about the country before I came here, only that I hid myself in the daytime and stumbled around seeking a place of refuge at night. If you report me I suppose I will not be allowed even a soldier's death. I shall probably be hung."

Suddenly the soldier laughed, such an

unhappy, curious laugh that Sally had but one desire and that was to escape from the château and her strange companion at once and forever. Yet in spite of his vague and uncertain expression, the soldier's eyes were dark and fine and his features well cut. He was merely thin and haggard and dirty from his recent experiences.

From his uniform it was impossible to guess anything; at least, it was impossible for Sally, who had but scant information with regard to military accoutrements.

But even in the face of his confession she was not considering the soldier's nationality. He looked so miserable and ill, so like a sick boy, that the maternal spirit which was really strongly rooted in Sally Ashton's nature awakened. He could scarcely stand as he talked to her.

"Please sit down. I don't know what you are to do," she remonstrated. "I don't know *why* you ran away or from whom, but no fate could be much worse than starving to death here in this old place alone. Yet certainly I don't want to give you up to—to anybody," she con-

cluded lamely, as a matter of fact not knowing to whom one should report a runaway soldier.

This was a different Sally Ashton from the girl her family and friends ordinarily knew. The evanescent dimple had disappeared entirely and also the indolent expression in her golden brown eyes. She was frowning and her lips were closed in a firmer line.

At her suggestion the soldier had returned to the chair which he had been occupying at the moment of her intrusion. But Sally saw that although he was seated he was swaying a little and that again he had put up his uninjured arm to his head.

"Perhaps I can get away from here, if you will help me. I have escaped being caught so far. I only ask you to bring me a little food. Tomorrow I shall be stronger."

Unconsciously Sally sighed. What fate had ever driven her forth into this undesired adventure?

She did not like to aid a runaway prisoner, nor did she wish him to meet the

disagreeable end he had suggested through any act of hers.

Any other one of the Camp Fire girls, Sally believed, would have given the soldier a lecture on the high ideals of patriotism, or of meeting with proper fortitude whatever fate might overtake him. At least he would have been required to divulge his nationality, and if he were an enemy, of course there could be no hesitation in delivering him to justice.

However, Sally only found herself answering:

"Yes, I suppose I can manage to bring you something to eat once more. But I cannot say when I can get here without anyone's knowing, so you must stay where you can hear when I call. Afterwards you must promise me to go away. I don't know what I ought to do about you."

Sally had gone a few yards from the château when she glanced back an instant toward the old stone ruins. The atmosphere of the afternoon had changed, the sun was no longer shining and the château lay deep in shadow.

A cold wind was blowing across the

desolate fields. Sally was not ordinarily impressionable, yet at this moment she felt a curious sense of foreboding.

CHAPTER X

Breakers Ahead

A LITTLE tired and also because her attention was occupied with her recent experience, Sally did not choose her way over the rough country-side so carefully and therefore managed to take a much longer time for her return to the farm.

Now that the sun had disappeared, the country-side seemed to have grown depressingly desolate. In the gray afternoon light the blackened tree trunks which had been partly burned were stark and ugly.

Under ordinary circumstances Sally was particularly susceptible to physical discomfort, yet this afternoon she was too concerned over her problem to be more than vaguely disturbed by her surroundings.

One thought continually assailed her. Would it be possible to appear among the

other girls looking and behaving as if nothing unusual had occurred? For Sally had an honest and profound conviction that she had no talent for deception. How could she realize that she belonged to the type of women with whom dissimulation is a fine art once the exigencies of a situation required it? She had come to one definite conclusion, she would not betray the presence of the runaway soldier in the château for at least another twenty-four hours. She would take him food the next day and he might have the opportunity to attempt an escape. In all probability he would soon be captured and punished, and this was doubtless the fate he deserved; nevertheless Sally was glad that, in a cowardly fashion, she would not be directly responsible.

She looked forward to the evening and the next day with no joy, bitterly regretting that she had not spent her leisure hours in resting and reading as she had at first intended. Surely repose and a contented spirit were more to be desired than unexpected adventures!

Weary and dispirited, Sally finally ar-

rived at home, only to be met in the front hall by Miss Patricia, who at once showed signs of an approaching storm.

As a matter of fact, she was excessively annoyed over a piece of information she had just received, so it was unfortunate that Sally should return at a moment when she must bear the brunt of it.

Moving a little listlessly up the broad uncarpeted stairs toward the bedroom she shared with her sister, the girl scarcely noticed the older woman's presence. She was hoping that Alice had not yet returned and that she might have a few moments to herself.

Miss Patricia opened the attack with her usual vigor.

"What do you mean, Sally, by going off this afternoon, knowing that I particularly needed your help? You must understand that it is highly improper for a young girl to tramp about over this French country alone. Even if Polly Burton has permitted you Camp Fire girls the most extraordinary amount of freedom, she surely has realized this and warned you against such indiscretion. There is

no way of guessing into what difficulty you may have already managed to entangle yourself!"

Sally felt herself flushing until her clear skin was suffused with glowing color.

"I am sorry, Miss Patricia," she said, "but remember that I am not a child and cannot have you speak to me as if I were a disobedient one. I have been for a walk and——"

But fortunately Sally was not required to complete her sentence. Suddenly Mrs. Burton had appeared out of her bedroom and began to hurry downstairs.

"Sally!" she called with a suggestion of appeal in her voice. "The excitement over your disappearance is my fault, so please don't you and Aunt Patricia quarrel. A little while ago when I returned home and Mère 'Toinette told me that you had gone out alone and she did not know in what direction, why, I became uneasy. You will not again, will you? Really I am afraid it is not safe for you children, although with me of course the case is different. Aunt Patricia is not disposed to think so, forgetting my advanced age.

Still, Sally, no matter how enthusiastic we may feel over our work here in the shell-torn area of France, we must remember these are war times when one never knows what may happen next. Besides, the French do not always understand our American ideas of liberty for young girls."

By this time having reached the foot of the stairs, Mrs. Burton slipped her hand inside Sally's, glancing back with a slightly amused and slightly apologetic expression toward Miss Patricia.

"Really, Aunt Patricia, I do regret your being so annoyed, yet you must not take my news too seriously. Our guests are sure not to remain with us long."

To the latter part of her Camp Fire guardian's remark Sally Ashton paid not the slightest heed, so concerned was she with the first part of her speech.

Why of all times should this question of her personal liberty come up for discussion *this* afternoon? Of her own free choice Sally felt convinced that she would never willingly go out alone. Nevertheless, how was she to keep her word to the

young soldier unless she returned next day to the chateau with the food she had promised him and without confiding the fact to any one else? Oh, why had she allowed herself to be drawn into this reckless promise? At this moment if she could only slip into her Camp Fire guardian's room and ask her advice! Miss Patricia would insist that if the soldier were a deserter he straightway should be brought to justice. But Sally understood her Camp Fire guardian well enough to appreciate that, once hearing the soldier in hiding was ill and wounded, she would be as reluctant as Sally herself to follow her manifest duty.

Confidence on this particular subject was for the present out of the question, and as soon as she conveniently could Sally disappeared inside her own room. Later, when the other girls had returned, weary from their long errand of mercy in the next village and yet immensely interested in their experience, Sally pretended to have a slight headache.

During supper she scarcely listened to the ever steady stream of conversation

which flowed unceasingly each evening. In the daytime the American newcomers to the old French farm on the Aisne were too much engaged to allow opportunity for conversation. After supper they gathered in their improvised sitting-room to talk until their early bedtime.

The sitting-room was oddly furnished with whatever furniture could be rescued after the commandeering of the more valuable possessions by the Germans.

In the attic a few broken chairs stored away for years had been brought down and repaired. These were beautiful pieces of furniture in conspicuous contrast to the couches and stools which originally had arrived at the farm as large wooden boxes containing provisions.

With old Jean's assistance, Peggy and Vera had developed unexpected talents as carpenters.

Moreover, whatever her faults, Miss Patricia Lord was an unfailing source of supply. During her brief stay in Paris, without mentioning the fact to any one else, she had purchased thirty yards of old blue and rose cretonne, perhaps with the

knowledge that beauty even of the simplest kind helps one to happiness and accomplishment.

Therefore the two couches in the sitting-room were covered with the cretonne, and half a dozen box chairs; and there were cretonne valances at the windows.

Save a single old lamp which had been left in the sitting-room, it had no other ornaments.

The lamp was of bronze and bore the figure of a genie holding the stand, so that obviously it had been christened "Aladdin's lamp." It was supposed to gratify whatever wish one expressed, but the Camp Fire girls were too busy with the interests of other people at present to spend much time in considering their personal desires.

There was one other object of interest in the room, a large photograph of the ruined Rheims Cathedral, which Mrs. Burton had bought in the neighborhood of Rheims not long before. The classic French city was not many miles from the present home of the group of American girls.

As beautiful almost in destruction as it had been in its former glory, the photograph stood as a symbol of the imperishable beauty of French art. Also it represented another symbol. Here on the white wooden mantel of the French farm house "on the field of honor" it called to the American people to continue their work for the relief and the restoration of France.

Tonight as she lay resting upon one of the couches, dressed in a simple dinner dress of some soft violet material, Mrs. Burton had glanced several times toward the photograph.

As a tribute to her headache and a general disinclination to associate with her companions, Sally had been permitted to occupy the other couch which stood on the opposite side of the room.

In their one large chair, close to the table with the lamp, Aunt Patricia sat knitting with her usual vigor and determination. Aside from Sally, the Camp Fire girls were grouped about near her.

After having been quiet for the past half hour, Mrs. Burton suddenly asked:

"Would any of you care to hear a poem concerning the destruction of the Cathedral at Rheims, written by a Kentucky woman? A friend sent it to me and it was so exquisite I have lately memorized it. In the last few moments while I have been looking at our photograph I have repeated the lines to myself. I wonder if it would interest you?"

The girls replied in a chorus of acquiescence, but Mrs. Burton did not venture to begin until she also had received a nod of agreement from Aunt Patricia. Between the older and younger woman there was a bond of strong affection. Nevertheless, mingled with Mrs. Burton's love and respect, there was also a certain humorous appreciation.

Since their arrival in France the Camp Fire girls had been compelled to spend their evenings indoors. This was unlike their former custom.

Recently, when they had grown weary of talking, perhaps for only a half hour before bedtime, some one of them had fallen into the habit of reading aloud to the others.

Apart from the pleasure, Mrs. Burton regarded this as useful education.

Not a great many newspapers and magazines reached the old farm house in comparison with other days at camp; nevertheless they arrived in sufficient number both from the United States and Paris to keep one fairly in touch with world movements. The reading of the French papers and magazines was of course especially good practice.

Yet, as a matter of fact, Mrs. Burton could seldom be persuaded to be anything save a listener. After reading or talking the greater part of the day to her new French friends, she was apt to be worn out by evening.

Tonight she began to speak in a low voice as if she were tired, yet as her little audience was so near it did not matter and her voice never failed in its beautiful quality.

"Rheims

"It was a people's church—stout, plain folk they,
Wanting their own catherdal, not the king's
Nor prelate's, nor great noble's. On the walls,
On porch and arch and doorway—see, the saints

Have the plain people's faces. That sweet Virgin
Was young Marie, who lived around the corner,
And whom the sculptor knew. From time to time
He saw her at her work, or with her babe,
So gay, so dainty, smiling at the child.
That sturdy Peter—Peter of the keys—
He was old Jean, the Breton fisherman,
Who, somehow, made his way here from the coast
And lived here many years, yet kept withal
The look of the great sea and his great nets.
And John there, the beloved, was Etienne,
And good St. James was François—brothers they,
And had a small, clean bakeshop, where they sold
Bread, cakes and little pies. Well, so it went!
These were not Italy's saints, nor yet the gods,
Majestic, calm, unmoved, of ancient Greece.
No, they were only townsfolk, common people,
And graced a common church—that stood and
stood
Through war and fire and pestilence, through
ravage
Of time and kings and conquerors, till at last
The century dawned which promised common men
The things they long had hoped for!
O the time
Showed a fair face, was daughter of great Demos,
Flamboyant, bore a light, laughed loud and free,
And feared not any man—until—until—
There sprang a mailed figure from a throne,
Gorgeous, imperial, glowing—a monstrosity
Magnificent as death and as death terrible.
It walked these aisles and saw the humble ones,

Peter the fisherman, James and John, the shop-
keepers,
And Mary, sweet, gay, innocent and poor.
Loud did it laugh and long. 'These peaceful folk!
What place have they in my great armed world?'
Then with its thunderbolts of fire it drove
These saints from out their places—breaking roof,
Wall, window, portal—and the great grave arch
Smoked with the awful funeral smoke of doom.

"Thus died they and their church—but from the
wreck
Of fire and smoke and broken wood and stone
There rose a figure greater far than they—
Their Lord, who dwells within no house of hands;
Whose beauty hath no need of any form!
Out from the fire He passed, and round Him went
Marie and Jean and Etienne and François,
And they went singing, singing, through their
France—
And Italy—and England—and the world!"

When Mrs. Burton began her recitation she sat up on the edge of her couch and leaning forward kept her eyes fastened sometimes on the floor, sometimes on the picture of the great cathedral. Now and then her gaze quickly swept the faces of her audience.

She was wondering if the poem had

bored any one of them. It was a long poem and perhaps its spiritual meaning would not be altogether plain.

However, as the poem reached its conclusion, and her voice with its dramatic power and sweetness made the picture of the peasant people and their peasant church a visible and compelling thing, she no longer felt fearful.

The faces of the girls before her were fine and serious; Bettina and Marta, who cared more for poetry and art than the others, had flushed and their eyes were filled with tears.

As Mrs. Burton finished, it was as if one could actually hear the new spirit of brotherhood which Christ preached two thousand years ago, "singing, singing, through the world."

Yet in the silence which was a fitting tribute to the poem, suddenly the entire audience broke into a ripple of laughter. From the far side of the room a gentle snore had been Sally Ashton's sole expression of appreciation.

Following the sound of the laughter, Sally sat up and began blinking her soft

golden brown eyes, looking for all the world like a sleepy kitten.

"I think you had far better give yourself up to justice and have someone take care of you properly," she announced in a far-away voice. This was the conclusion which Sally had just reached at the end of her half-sleeping and half-waking dream of her runaway soldier.

She did not know that she was to make such an extraordinary remark aloud, but fortunately no one had the faintest knowledge of her meaning.

Indeed, no one really heard her, as the girls were too amused over Sally's characteristic habit of falling asleep on occasions when conversation or entertainment bored her.

Immediately after the laughter, Sally, not understanding its cause, nevertheless arose and began her journey to bed. She was annoyed but not seriously, since in waking she had reached the conclusion she desired. In the morning at dawn, before the other members of her household were awake, she would make a second trip to the château.

She would carry provisions to the soldier and then advise him to leave the neighborhood immediately. Unless he departed of his own free will, taking his chances as he must, she then would be compelled to tell that he was in hiding.

CHAPTER XI

The Return

BEFORE daylight Sally rose softly and began to dress, feeling extremely irritated. She disliked getting up in the mornings and this scheme of arising early was so annoying that it had kept her awake the greater part of the night.

Besides she had but little hope of not arousing Alice. Once as she was searching quietly on the floor for her shoes, Alice sat up, asking severely:

"What on earth are you doing, Sally Ashton? If you are not ill, come on back to bed. If you are ill, come back in any case and let me get whatever it is you desire."

Sally murmured something vague and indeterminate about endeavoring to discover a lost pillow and Alice fell comfortably asleep again, nor did she awaken

when Sally at last slipped out of the room and down stairs.

In case any one else heard her or called, she had made up her mind to explain that she was seeing about some preparation for breakfast. As "housekeeper extraordinary" this statement *might* be believed, even if it were unlike her to start her ministrations so early.

But no one was disturbed and Sally got her little bundle of provisions together quickly, since she knew just where the supplies of food were kept. They had not a great deal, considering the demands that were constantly being made upon them by the people in the neighborhood who were less well off, so Sally felt that she had not the right to be over-generous, and made her selections with due discretion.

It was more than ever her determination to demand that the soldier leave the château at once this morning, if he could be induced to see the wisdom of such a proceeding, but if not by nightfall.

Also Sally had made up her mind to ask no questions. If the soldier were arrested

later she wished to know as little as possible concerning him.

He had spoken of being captured and of running away from his captors. This suggested that he was a German or an Austrian who had been taken prisoner and was trying to effect an escape. If this were true Sally felt a fierce condemnation of her own cowardly attitude. But was it not remotely possible that the soldier had committed some offense and had then run away from his own regiment? However, this point of view was but little in his favor. As he spoke English with an accent and as foreign accents were all of an equal mystification to Sally, it was possible that she need never know his origin.

Outdoors and slipping through the garden, to Sally's surprise and consternation she nearly ran into old Jean, who appeared to have been up all night caring for his stock.

He looked like a gnome with his wrinkled skin, his little eyes, his muddy gray hair and even his clothes almost of a color with the earth.

He was carrying a lantern, but instead

of speaking beckoned mysteriously to Sally to follow him out to Miss Patricia's barn, where a half dozen cows were now installed.

Not knowing what else to do, Sally stood by until she found herself presented with a small pail of milk, and still with no comments, for immediately after Jean went on with his morning's work.

She did not waste time, however, in puzzling over the old servant man.

After drinking a small quantity of the milk, not wishing to throw the rest away or to return to the house, Sally concluded to take it with her as a part of her offering. Yet she had no real desire to give refreshment to her accidental acquaintance.

Some curious feminine force must have moved Sally Ashton on this occasion. Most women find it difficult to allow a human being to endure physical suffering, once the person is delivered into their care

As she made her way to the château for the second time Sally loathed the cold dark morning and there was no beauty nor significance to her in the gray leaden sky

which lay like a mourning veil over the sad French landscape.

Sally considered that she was engaged in an almost unjustifiable action. Yet she could not make up her mind to leave the soldier to starve, or to betray his presence in the château.

Moreover, Sally was haunted by a small nervous fear, which may have been out of place in the face of the larger issues which were involved. As the soldier in hiding had no reason to believe she would arrive so early in the morning, he might still be asleep. Sally disliked the idea that thus she might be called upon to awaken him. The conventions of life were dear to her, she had a real appreciation of their value and place in social life and no desire to break with any one of them.

The food could be left in the dismantled old drawing-room, under its arch of leaning walls, but Sally wished to leave a command as well as the food. After this one unhappy pilgrimage she would do nothing more for the soldier's safety and comfort. He must take his chances and slip away.

The entire neighborhood was disturb-

ingly quiet. An owl of late habits would have been almost companionable. Upon one point Sally considered herself inflexible. She would not enter the château; she might call softly from the outside if it were necessary. If no one replied she would return to the farm and nevermore would the château be honored by her presence.

In an entirely different state of mind she approached the old house on this second occasion and made her way to the opening between the walls.

Inside there seemed an even more uncanny silence. Yet how could one call to an utter stranger whose name, whose identity, whose nationality were all unknown?

"Halloo!" Sally cried in a faint voice, not once but three or four times.

There was no reply.

She called again. Then she entered the drawing-room quickly with no other idea than to put down her offerings and flee away as soon as possible. Sally was possessed of the impression that, however long the wrecked walls might remain in

position while she was outside them, once inside she would be buried beneath a descending mass.

A few feet within the arch she discovered her soldier.

He had made for himself a bed out of an old mattress which he had dragged from some other room, using a torn covering which once had been a beautiful eiderdown quilt. As he had no pillow and his face was completely uncovered, Sally realized he was in a stupor and so ill that he had not heard her approach or her repeated calls.

Fortunately Sally Ashton was essentially practical.

Moreover, in an extraordinary fashion for so young and presumably selfish a girl she immediately forgot herself. She was living in an atmosphere of unselfishness and devotion to others, so the thought that the object of her present care was not a worthy object did not at the moment influence her.

In a matter-of-fact and skillful fashion Sally first poured a small amount of milk inside her patient's parted lips. Except

that the soldier became half aroused by her act and seemed to wish more, there was no difficulty. Then unwrapping the arm which she had bandaged the day before, she cleansed the wound a second time with the antiseptic she had brought for the purpose.

Afterwards, realizing that she must find the water she had been told was still to be had in one of the rooms of the château, without considering her previous fears, Sally climbed and crawled through one dangerous opening after the other, in spite of her awkwardness in any unaccustomed physical exertion. Finally she discovered the water. Then in a half broken pitcher, secured in passing through one of the wrecked bedrooms, she carried a small amount to the drawing-room.

Without hesitation or embarrassment the girl bathed her undesired patient's face and hands. He had fine, strong features; there was nothing in the face to suggest weakness or cowardice. Still it remained impossible to decide his nationality or whether he was an officer or merely

a common soldier, since his outfit was a patchwork of oddly assorted garments.

Sally's acquaintance with uniforms was limited. She knew that the French wore the horizon blue and the British and Americans a nearly similar shade of khaki.

Her patient's outfit was like no other she had seen.

Yet over these minor details she did not trouble. In spite of her lack of experience, Sally was convinced that the soldier was now suffering from blood poison due to neglect of his wound and the unhealthy and unsanitary conditions in which he had been living.

The day before she had thought he looked and acted strangely and had half an idea that he may have been partly delirious then, so she was not altogether surprised by the present situation.

During her journey across the fields daylight had come; because she would not otherwise have been able to accomplish her present task even so inadequately as she had accomplished it, Sally was pleased.

Yet when the moment arrived and she

had done all she could for the soldier's comfort she had to face her real difficulty.

There is no mistake in this world more serious than to judge other people's problems in the light in which they appear to us. The problem which is nothing to one human being appears insurmountable to another.

So with Sally Ashton's present difficulty.

She had made up her mind to tell the soldier that unless he left the château before the following day she would be compelled to tell her friends of his hiding place and ask advice. But she had meant to warn him of her intention and allow him to take his chances if he preferred.

Now he appeared defenceless and entirely at her mercy.

Should she betray him at once? Certainly there was a possibility that he would die of neglect if left alone at the château. But then he must have faced this possibility and deliberately chosen it.

Sally wondered what would become of an escaped prisoner if he were discovered to be desperately ill? It did not seem pos-

sible that the military authorities would be so severe as he had anticipated.

Yet she knew very little of the ways of military authorities, and an escaped prisoner would scarcely be an object of devoted attention.

Although not aware of the fact, already Sally had assumed a protective attitude toward the soldier.

One thing she might do and that was to wait another twenty-four hours. It was barely possible that he might not be so ill as she now believed.

At present she must not remain a moment longer at the château. Instead she must run back across the fields, since it was her plan to reach the farm house and be discovered in the act of assisting Mère 'Toinette in the preparation of breakfast.

CHAPTER XII

Other Days and Other Ways

UNDER the new conditions of life in the devastated country of France, it has been difficult to set down the effect which the change of environment, the change of interest and of inspiration had upon each individual member of the Sunrise Camp Fire unit.

Certainly their present daily life bore but a faint resemblance to their former outdoor summer encampments in various picturesque places in the United States. Nevertheless the Camp Fire girls always had considered that they were doing useful work merely by following the rules of their camp fire and by gaining the honors necessary to the growth of their organization and their own official rank.

Now they realized that all their efforts had been but a preparation for the service they were at present undertaking. There was no detail of their past experience

which was not of service, their Health Craft, Camp Craft, Home Craft, Business and Patriotism. Why, their very watch cry, "Wohelo"—work, health and love—embodied the three gifts they were trying to restore to the poverty-stricken French people in this particular neighborhood upon "the field of honor!"

On this afternoon, in spite of the cold, the girls had arranged to hold their first out-of-doors Camp Fire meeting since their arrival in France.

For weeks they had been working among the young French girls in the villages and the country near at hand, persuading them to spend whatever leisure they had in studying the Camp Fire ideas and activities.

Bettina Graham and Alice Ashton had introduced as much Camp Fire study as possible into the regular routine of the school which they held daily in the big schoolroom at the farm. Even with the younger children there were like suggestions of play and of service which Marta Clark and Yvonne were able to give.

But until this afternoon there had

been no actual organization of the first group of Camp Fire girls in France. Strange that with Camp Fires in England, Australia, Africa, Japan, China and other foreign places, there should have been none in France! But Yvonne Fleury could have explained that, unlike American girls, French girls were not accustomed to intimate association with one another, their lives up to the time of their marriage being spent in seclusion among the members of their own family.

Indeed, upon this same afternoon Yvonne was thinking of this as she dressed slowly before going outdoors to join the other girls. The house was empty save that Mère 'Toinette was working downstairs.

Marta Clark and Peggy had been kind enough to make her a simple Camp Fire costume, the khaki skirt and blouse, which formed their ordinary service costume. Notwithstanding she had been studying the Camp Fire manual and trying to acquire the necessary honors, this was the first time Yvonne had worn the costume.

How utterly unlike anything she had ever dreamed were these past weeks in her life! From the moment of her confession of weakness and the telling of her story to Mrs. Burton, Yvonne had deliberately chosen to remain with her rather than continue with the canteen work which she had originally planned to do in returning to her own country.

For one reason she had fallen under the spell of Mrs. Burton's sympathy and charm; moreover, the girls in the Camp Fire work were nearer her own age and were to undertake a character of occupation in which she felt herself able to be useful. They were also going to live in the neighborhood of her old home before the outbreak of the war.

As a matter of fact, although Yvonne had preferred not to confide the information to any one except Mrs. Burton, she was at present not fifty miles from the château in France where she had lived until the night word came that she and her family must fly before the oncoming horde of the enemy.

Well, more than three years had passed

since that night, three years which sometimes seemed an eternity to Yvonne. She had no wish to revisit the ruins of her old home, no wish to be reminded of it. There was no one left for whom she cared except perhaps a few neighbors.

However, in the last few weeks Yvonne ordinarily did not permit herself to become depressed. This much she felt she owed to Mrs. Burton's kindness and to the comradeship which had been so generously given to her by the Camp Fire girls. Yvonne felt a particular affection for each one of them. She could not of course feel equally attracted. So far she cared most for Peggy Webster and for Mary Gilchrist, possibly attracted toward Mary because she also was an outsider like herself. Then Mary's boyish attitude toward life, her utter freedom even from the knowledge of the conventions in which Yvonne had been so carefully reared, at first startled, then amused the young French girl. But for Peggy Webster, Yvonne had a peculiar feeling of love and admiration. This may have been partly due to the fact that Peggy was Mrs. Bur-

ton's niece and so shared in the glamor of the great lady's personality, but it was more a tribute to Peggy's own character.

After Yvonne's pathetic account of her history, Mrs. Burton had told at least a measure of her story to Peggy. She had asked Peggy to invoke the compassion and aid of the other girls and to do what she could for Yvonne herself.

To Peggy's strength, to the freedom and the courage of her outlook upon life, Yvonne's tragic story had appealed strongly, but more Yvonne's timidity. Often the young French girl appeared unwilling to go on with the daily struggle of life when everything for which she had ever cared had been taken from her.

Among the American Camp Fire girls there was only one girl for whom Yvonne felt a sensation of distrust which almost amounted to a dislike, and this was Sally Ashton. Nevertheless, in the early days of their acquaintance, Yvonne had not this point of view. Then she had admired Sally's prettiness, the gold brown of her hair and eyes, her white skin and even her indolent manners and graces. Yet re-

cently Yvonne had become aware of a circumstance, or rather of a series of circumstances, which had first surprised, then puzzled and finally repelled her.

In a few moments Yvonne left the farm house. If she were late at their first outdoor camp fire she realized she would have no difficulty in discovering the site they had selected, although it was at some distance away.

Some time had passed since the arrival of the Camp Fire party in this neighborhood of France and now even in the winter fields there was a suggestion of approaching spring.

As Yvonne walked on she felt an unselfish joy, a greater lightness of heart. Surely the spring would bring back some of her lost happiness to France. There would be another great drive, another tragic contest of strength, but the British and French lines would hold.

Yvonne had the great faith and courage of her people, now she had learned to lay aside her personal sorrow.

In a few more weeks Miss Patricia's American tractor, which was indeed a

"strange god in a machine", would be able to turn these fields into plowed land ready for the spring planting.

But now in a meadow, while still some distance away, Yvonne beheld an American, a French and a British flag set up on temporary staffs, and blending their colors and designs in a symbolic fashion as they floated in the wind.

Yvonne paused for a moment to watch the group of her acquaintances and friends.

Standing apart from the girls were Miss Patricia Lord, Mrs. Burton, and the two visitors who had arrived only a few days before. They were the guests whose approaching visit to the farm house Miss Patricia had so openly deplored, one of them Mrs. Bishop and the other Monsieur Duval, both of them ship acquaintances. Mrs. Bishop was in France to represent an American magazine and was at present intending to write a series of articles on the reclamation work along the Aisne and the Marne.

Monsieur Duval had given no explanation for his appearance save to announce

that he had some especial work on hand for his government in the southern districts of France.

In spite of the fact that fuel was of such tremendous value in France at the present time, the Camp Fire girls had permitted themselves the extravagance of a fire to inaugurate their first outdoor Camp Fire ceremony. The boxes in which Miss Patricia's various purchases had come to the farm had proved useful for more than one service.

In a circle near the camp fire were eight young French girls who this afternoon were to receive the woodgatherers' rings. Just beyond them the American girls were seated.

Peggy had been chosen to present the rings.

Possibly they were waiting for Yvonne's arrival, for no sooner had she slipped silently into her place than Peggy Webster arose and recited the Woodgatherer's Desire.

"As fagots are brought from the forest,
Firmly held by the sinews which bind them,
I will cleave to my Camp Fire sisters
Wherever, whenever I find them.

"I will strive to grow strong like the pine tree,
To be pure in my deepest desire;
To be true to the truth that is in me
And follow the Law of the Fire."

Then she offered each one of the French girls a silver ring. When she came to Yvonne, clasping the Fire Maker's bracelet about her wrist, she whispered:

"We feel, Yvonne, that you have a right to a higher order in our new Camp Fire group than the other members because of the help you have given us in whatever work we have attempted since our arrival in France. In fact, you are the leading French Camp Fire girl!"

A moment later, in answer to a signal, Mrs. Burton walked over and stood just beyond the two circles of girls and the camp fire and close to the Allied flags.

"There is not much I feel able to say to you," she began, speaking in a simple and friendly fashion. "I think perhaps you

are already beginning to understand how intensely the people of the United States desire to render to France a part of the debt we owe her. It is France who has saved our liberty and the liberty of the entire world.

"Now I hope that the first group of Camp Fire girls in France will later carry the flaming torch until the news of the Camp Fire movement has spread through all the French land. In the Camp Fire life we look for the romance, the beauty and the adventure which may be hidden in the smallest task. More important than these things I hope Camp Fire girls the world over may become a part of the new spirit everywhere growing up among women, the spirit of union, the ability to work and play together as men have in the past. For once all girls and women are united, there will be a new league for peace among the nations such as this world has never known."

CHAPTER XIII

A Departure and an Arrival

ONE evening two days later a little after the hour for bed-time at the farm, Mrs. Burton knocked softly at Miss Patricia's door.

Miss Patricia quickly opened it.

"You are ill, Polly Burton. Well, it is just what I have been expecting ever since the arrival of that strange man and woman. It seems to me that we had quite enough to do without entertaining guests. Besides, it strikes me as pure waste of energy, this riding about through the country with strangers when you should be at some *real* work."

During her speech Miss Patricia had drawn the younger woman into her room, closed the door behind her and was now gazing at her severely but it must be confessed solicitously as well.

"But I am not ill, Aunt Patricia," Mrs. Burton protested as soon as she was

allowed an opportunity to speak. "I only came in to have a talk with you about something important."

Aunt Patricia's bedroom was large and empty, for there was more space at the old farm house than furniture. A great old-fashioned French bed had been spared from the general wreckage and upon this Mrs. Burton seated herself, drawing her feet up under her and her lavender dressing gown about her, since with so little heat in the house the bedrooms were uncomfortably cold.

There was but one solitary stiff-backed chair, in which Miss Patricia sat perfectly erect.

"Why not come here and sit beside me? There is plenty of room, and you will be more comfortable," Mrs. Burton urged.

Aunt Patricia shook her head.

"I am quite comfortable where I am. Moreover, Polly Burton, if I am an old woman and you no longer a young one, at the same time I am aware that you have every idea of trying to persuade me to some point of view of which you do not think I will approve. I have seen your

methods before this evening. Thank you, I shall remain where I am."

Mrs. Burton laughed.

Aunt Patricia did look so uncompromising in a hideous smoke-gray dressing gown made without any attempt at decorations. Her small knot of hair was screwed into a tight coil at the back of her head.

Mrs. Burton's own hair had kept its beautiful dusky quality, it had the dark sheen of the hair of the mythical Irish fairies, for only in Anglo-Saxon countries are fairies of necessity fair. Tonight Mrs. Burton's hair was unbound and hung about her shoulders as if she were a girl.

Fearing that Miss Patricia might regard her frivolous appearance with disfavor, she now began braiding it into one heavy braid.

"What ever it is you desire to say, I do wish you would begin, Polly, so that we both can go to bed," the elderly spinster remarked.

Mrs. Burton shook her head. "You are not in a good humor, are you, Aunt Patricia? But at least there is one thing you

will be glad to hear: our guests, Monsieur Duval and Mrs. Bishop, are leaving our farm the day after tomorrow."

"A good riddance," Miss Patricia answered sharply.

Then observing that her companion had flushed and undoubtedly was annoyed by her plain speaking, Aunt Patricia's manner became slightly mollified.

"It is not that I have anything personal against your friends, Polly. I must say they have both endeavored to be very agreeable since their arrival and to give as little trouble as possible. But I told you on board ship I did not like the attitude of that Frenchman toward you. It was no surprise to me when he discovered he had important business in this part of France. Of course it should not be necessary for me to remind you that you are a married woman, with your unfortunate husband serving his country in France many miles from here and also that you are chaperoning a group of young girls. I suppose you will simply tell me that I do not understand French manners, but that is neither here nor there, Polly Burton. Your

Frenchman is polite to your friend, Mrs. Bishop, I must confess he is also courteous to me; but I am obliged to repeat that his manner neither to Mrs. Bishop nor to me is in the least like his manner to you."

"Aunt Patricia, you are so ridiculous! Still I don't feel like laughing this time; you really are making me angry," Mrs. Burton answered.

"I have made a great many persons angry in my life, Polly. I cannot even flatter myself that this is the first time I have offended you. However, I feel compelled to speak the truth." Miss Patricia's tone remained imperturbable.

"But that is just the trouble, Aunt Patricia, you are not speaking the truth, although of course I know you don't realize it and I beg your pardon," Mrs. Burton argued. "But why do you allow yourself to acquire such prejudices and such foolish impressions? I simply refuse to discuss the suggestion you have just made. Please never speak of it to me again."

Ordinarily when the celebrated Mrs. Burton assumed an air of offended dignity such as she wore at present her world

was apt to sue for pardon. Miss Patricia revealed no such intention. As a matter of fact, as she remained resolutely silent and as Mrs. Burton had not yet explained the reason for her visit, it was she who had to resume the conversation in a conciliatory manner.

"I presume you won't approve then, Aunt Patricia, of what I wish to speak to you. Monsieur Duval has been ordered to southern France on some work for his government and has asked Mrs. Bishop and me to accompany him, because it is work in which he thinks we may be useful. You know the Germans have been sending back some of the French refugees whom they drove before them in their retreat. There are groups of five hundred at a time who now and then are sent over the border either from Germany or Switzerland. They are penniless and not only have no money or food or clothes; they do not know whether their families are living or dead and in any case have no way to reach them. The French government is to try to arrange some plan by which homes may be secured for these unfortu-

nate people until they can communicate with their relatives or friends."

"An excellent idea, but I do not exactly see your connection with it," Miss Patricia returned.

Mrs. Burton shrugged her shoulders impatiently. In all her life she never remembered any one who had opposed her desires in exactly the same fashion Miss Patricia did. Then, a little ashamed of herself, she answered gently but firmly:

"My connection is that I am interested and that Mrs. Bishop and I have both decided to accompany Monsieur Duval. It is barely possible that we may be useful and able to offer a certain amount of advice. So many of the refugees are young women who have suffered impossible things and may require special care and shelter. Besides, I am very deeply anxious to see more of the country. We expect to travel south in the sector the Germans held three years ago. I will thus be able to find out how much restoration work has already been accomplished and how great a task remains. Moreover, Aunt Patricia dear, I have a personal

errand. Surely you will think this important.

"You remember my talking to you of the old peasant whose granddaughter, Elsie, had been driven into exile. Except to me the old woman has never spoken of her loss. Now there is a possibility that Elsie has been sent back into France and I have promised Grand'mère to search for her.

"Moreover, Aunt Patricia, each village in the devastated districts has been ordered to prepare a list of names of the missing who disappeared at the time of the German retreat. These lists are to be turned over to Monsieur Duval. A committee is to be appointed near the frontier to take charge of the lists and see that the refugees get in touch with their own people as soon as possible. Don't you think this a wonderful scheme?"

As Mrs. Burton unfolded the plan which had been carefully worked out with a great deal of foresight and care, in her enthusiasm she forgot Miss Patricia's chilling attitude. She had spent many hours during the brief visit at the farm of Mrs.

Bishop and Monsieur Duval in the outline she had just explained.

Aunt Patricia continued to look unimpressed and uninspired.

"I told you before, Polly, that I had no idea of criticizing Monsieur Duval's efforts in behalf of his government. I know the situation you speak of is extremely deplorable. Still I fail to see any reason for your assistance. There is sufficient work for you in this immediate neighborhood. However, I presume you have definitely made up your mind," Miss Patricia concluded.

Before replying, Mrs. Burton waited a moment, watching for a sign of yielding in her companion. But as Miss Patricia gave none, she nodded her head.

"Yes, Aunt Patricia, I am going with Mrs. Bishop and Monsieur Duval, although I am sorry you do not approve of my making the trip. I won't be away more than two weeks and I feel I may be of greater service than by remaining here."

"You also feel that traveling about through the French country with a dis-

tinguished French politician and a woman author will be far more exciting than staying at the farm and doing your duty, Polly Burton," Miss Patricia added, allowing her accumulated anger to overflow at last. "Do, please, whatever else you wish to add by way of camouflage, at least confess the truth. I presume it is your idea to leave me to look after the group of girls you undertook to chaperon in France?"

In spite of the fact that by this time, Mrs. Burton, whose amiability was never her strong point, was in as bad a temper as her antagonist, she had to confess to herself that in Miss Patricia's last speech the scales dropped in her favor.

"Why, yes, Aunt Patricia, that is what I wish you to do. But will it be such a serious responsibility? The work at the farm is so splendidly organized now and the girls are so deeply interested, I don't see why you should have any especial difficulty if you will just allow things to go on as they are at present."

Of her own free will Miss Patricia at this moment rose from her stiff chair and

came and sat on the edge of the bed facing the younger woman. She showed no sign of relaxing either physically or mentally, or of any softening in her rigid point of view.

"I wonder, Polly Burton, if you have any reason for believing that things usually go on in exactly the same fashion in this world, after one has carefully arranged that they should? Of course I shall do my best to look after the Camp Fire girls, although they do not like me and I do not understand them. There is no telling what may occur in your absence," Miss Patricia ended so gloomily that Mrs. Burton's eyes shone with merriment, although she carefully lowered her lids.

At the same instant, to her surprise, she felt Miss Patricia lean over and seize her by both shoulders. For a second she wondered if Aunt Patricia had made up her mind to shake her because of her rebellion.

Instead Miss Patricia added unexpectedly:

"Polly, my dear child, I really don't wish you to go on this wild goose chase,

partly for the reasons I have given you, but also because I am afraid for you. You know the world is expecting another great German offensive this spring and no one understands why it has been delayed so long. Well, you must realize that as you travel farther south in France the line between the German and the French armies grows narrower and narrower. Only a few miles of victory and the Germans will again occupy their old line! It is possible you might arrive at some district at a crucial moment when a battle was beginning. Then the saints alone could preserve you!"

With the last few words of her long speech Miss Patricia reverted to her Irish brogue and her Irish faith.

Afterwards Mrs. Burton was glad to remember that, although Aunt Patricia certainly was not regarding her with affection at the moment, nevertheless, she slipped her arm about the elderly lady's hard and upright shoulders.

"You are a dear, Aunt Patricia! But please don't worry. We are not going into any dangerous neighborhoods. The

drive will not begin for many weeks. In any case there will be no retreat. Yet indeed we mean to take every possible precaution and at no time will we be near the German line. It is good of you to think I am worth worrying over, but this time it is not necessary."

"Have you your husband's permission for this trip, Polly? I presume you have written Richard Burton of your new French friend?" Aunt Patricia demanded as a last forlorn hope.

In reply Mrs. Burton smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I have done both of those things. I wrote Richard about Monsieur Duval soon after our meeting on shipboard. But of course I have had no reply to my letter with regard to my trip south with Mrs. Bishop and Monsieur Duval, for there is not time for me to hear before we leave."

"And nothing will change your decision, Polly?"

Mrs. Burton had slid down on to the floor from the high old bed and now stood before Miss Patricia, hesitating for the fraction of a second.

"I do wish you would not put the question in such a way, Aunt Patricia. You make me think of what Sally Ashton said to you, as if I too were a disobedient child, and I am more than twice Sally's age. Of course I do not wish to do anything you oppose, but the trip to southern France and the work I hope to be able to accomplish will be a great opportunity and a great experience. I hope you will make up your mind to feel as I do before we start the day after tomorrow."

Before Aunt Patricia could reply, Mrs. Burton made a hasty and carefully designed retreat. Being fully cognizant that there was no possibility of Miss Patricia's relenting, she wished to pretend to believe she might change her mind and at the same time to announce the proposed time for her own departure.

Fortunately for Mrs. Burton's courage and decision, her plan met with no especial opposition from any other member of the Camp Fire group.

The girls regretted her leaving, and Sally Ashton more than the others; nevertheless it appeared to them as it had

to Mrs. Burton, as a wonderful chance for service and at the same time a thrilling adventure.

Two days later, even at the moment when the automobile appeared at the door to bear off Mrs. Burton and her two companions, Miss Patricia's attitude remained unchanged.

Mrs. Burton devoted the last five minutes before her departure to begging Aunt Patricia to bestow her final consent and parting blessing. Aunt Patricia steadfastly refused.

She also declined to see the automobile leave the farm. Instead, during the final farewells, turning her back upon the assembly, she marched up alone to her own room. Once inside, it is true she wiped away several tears, but immediately after set herself to writing a letter to Captain Richard Burton. And Captain Burton and Miss Patricia only were to know what the letter contained! Fortunately Captain Burton understood Miss Patricia and her devotion to his wife. Moreover, the extent of her devotion was to be proven later.

The following day, perhaps because of Miss Patricia's prediction that nothing in life runs on continuously in the same groove, an unexpected telegram was brought out to the French farm house for Peggy Webster.

In the telegram Lieutenant Ralph Marshall of the United States Aviation Service in France stated that, having been slightly injured by a fall, he had secured a few days' leave of absence. Would he be permitted to spend his leave with Mrs. Burton and the Camp Fire girls at their farm house on the Aisne?

To Peggy Webster there appeared to be but one possible answer to this amazing piece of good fortune, and fortunately she was able to persuade Aunt Patricia to the same point of view. Miss Patricia did not approve of young men, but she did approve of Peggy and understood the situation in regard to Ralph.

Therefore the return telegram read: "Yes."

Except for brief intervals, Peggy and Ralph had seen but little of each other since their summer together in Arizona, a

summer which had been fateful for them both. It had not occurred to Peggy that either she or Ralph would ever change their minds with regard to their future marriage, in spite of the fact that she was but eighteen years old and Ralph not much older. There remained only the question of persuading their two families to share their view.

In the last two years Ralph had been redeeming his former idleness. Having volunteered for aviation work before the entry of the United States into the world war, he had been able to secure a commission and already had been in France a number of months.

CHAPTER XIV

A Warning

IT was the morning after the departure of Mrs. Burton and her guests and three days before the arrival of Ralph Marshall for his visit at the farm house on the Aisne.

Having completed her work downstairs, Sally Ashton had hurried up to her bedroom where at present she was making little nervous preparations as if intending to go outdoors and anxious not to be observed.

There was no reason why she should feel alarmed. So far as she knew, every member of her household was occupied with the day's work. From the schoolroom below she could hear the voices of the children singing a little French chanson, and now and then one of the older girls either asking a question or reciting. Alice Ashton and Bettina Graham, Marta

Clark and Yvonne Fleury were engaged with their pupils.

An hour before Peggy and Vera had driven off in the motor with Mary Gilchrist, since Mary had promised to transport a number of wounded soldiers from a train to a nearby convalescent hospital, and was uncertain whether she would find anyone at the railroad station to help. Therefore she had asked the two girls to accompany her. Peggy also desired to mail a letter to Ralph Marshall which might reach him before he started upon his journey.

Always Aunt Patricia was occupied outdoors from breakfast until lunch time. So in spite of the fact that Sally Ashton showed a degree of suppressed excitement both in her manner and appearance, there would seem to have been no apparent excuse. A certain timorousness once wholly unlike her, lately had appeared in Sally's attitude.

She also had grown thinner and her big golden brown eyes had lost their sleepy expression and acquired an anxious appeal. The lines about her full, rather

pouting lips were strained and apprehensive.

Having at the moment pulled a small traveling bag down from a shelf overhead and allowed it to fall on the floor, Sally did not hear the swift opening and closing of her bedroom door. Therefore, when she had secured her bag and was straightening up, she gave an exclamation of surprise on discovering her sister standing within a few feet of her.

Except that she was handsomer, Alice looked very like her mother, the Esther of the first Camp Fire days, yet she and Sally bore no possible resemblance to each other either in disposition or appearance.

Alice was tall and slender, with a grave, severe air. She wore her dark red hair parted and bound about the back of her head in a heavy braid. She was a little angular. There was a suggestion that unless life dealt generously with her, granting her the gifts which make for tenderness and softness in a woman's nature, she might in time have the appearance one is supposed to associate with an old maid.

However, old maids are as unlike as the rest of the human species.

Certainly at the present moment her expression was austere, although uneasy and distressed as well.

"What are you doing, Sally?" she inquired, her voice gentle and solicitous, yet observing that a wave of color had swept over Sally's face even before she had spoken.

The next moment Sally flung her bag down on the floor again, answering petulantly:

"What am I doing? Well, really, Alice, I do not see what difference it makes to you, or why you should slip into our room so quietly that you frightened me. As a matter of fact, I got down my traveling bag to—to——" Sally's voice trailed off helplessly for an instant. The next instant, gathering force, she repeated: "I pulled down my bag because I wished to store away some odds and ends which I wish to keep safely."

Then losing her temper in a most suspicious fashion, suddenly Sally stamped her foot as if she were an angry child and at

the same time her eyes grew unexpectedly dark and lovely.

"That is not what you came into this room to announce to me, Alice. So please say whatever it is you wish and be through. I am going out for a little walk before lunch." In any event Sally was no coward!

Then sit down. You do not look very well and I am afraid you won't like what I must say," Alice returned. "Understand, it gives me no pleasure; instead, I am tremendously worried and unhappy. I suppose I should have talked the situation over with Tante before she went away, but I knew it would interfere with her trip and so avoided troubling her."

In answer to her sister's suggestion Sally seated herself upon a tall, old-fashioned wooden chair, so that only her toes were able to reach the ground. All at once she had felt as if she would be more comfortable seated. It was not because of Alice's suggestion that she had agreed, but because of a sudden sensation of weariness, almost of physical weakness, although this last idea seemed absurd.

Yet somehow Sally appeared so like a tired and rebellious child that her sister found it difficult to continue their conversation. However, she must introduce the accusation she had been schooling herself to make before entering the room.

"Is there anything you would like to talk to me about, Sally? Outside our daily life and work here at the farm is there anything which has been interesting you recently and which you have preferred not to mention to anybody?" Alice inquired gently, her voice shaken by her effort to hide her concern, while a fine line appeared between her level brows.

Pretending to be bored rather than affected in any other fashion by her sister's speech, first Sally shrugged her shoulders. Then making a pretence of yawning, she placed her fingers lightly over her lips.

"Really, Alice, what on earth is troubling you in connection with me? Have you had me on your conscience more than usual recently? Can't you ever get over your unattractive habit of treating me as if I were a refractory pupil and you an offended schoolmarm? In spite of being

born in New England, there is no reason to affect this pose, as it is unnecessary and I think most unbecoming.

Sally's manner was a little too self-assured, but otherwise she appeared as enigmatic as an accomplished actress. Gazing at her earnestly, there was nothing in her expression at present to suggest any emotion save a natural annoyance at being catechized.

But Alice was not deceived.

"Please don't assume such an air of offended virtue, Sally. You are far too fond of employing it when anyone reproaches you," Alice continued, but really too sincerely disturbed to feel angered by her sister's behavior. "Evidently you do not wish to confide in me, so I suppose there is no use wasting either your time or mine. For the past two weeks—I don't know the exact length of time, although you are aware of it, Sally—you have been disappearing from the farm almost every day. At first I did not notice. You seem to have been careful that neither Aunt Patricia, nor Tante, nor I should know. And you have been clever. But you could not

escape everybody's observation and the other Camp Fire girls have seen you and been puzzled and at last worried to guess what you could be doing. You need not ask who the girls were; I shall not tell you. But finally several of them felt compelled to speak to me and to suggest that I ask your confidence. Oh, don't pretend you think you have been spied upon and badly treated. You know, Sally, that unless the girls cared for you they would not have troubled? But we have lived almost as one family and our interests are bound together. Do tell me what you have been doing, dear? What has taken you away from home so many times alone? I have been watching you myself recently. When I came into our room only a few minutes ago you were preparing to slip away."

Sally was biting her lips and had lost her childish look.

"This is not a criminal court, Alice; neither are you the public prosecutor. As a matter of fact, I refuse to answer your questions or to gratify either your curiosity or the curiosity of the Camp Fire girls.

What I have been doing has harmed no one; at least I do not think it has, and I have not always been alone. Old Jean has been with me much of the time and has helped in every way. But by the time Tante returns I think I shall be free to tell her everything. Can't you trust me until then?"

Sally's voice and manner had suddenly changed from bravado to pleading, but Alice was too angry and too frightened to be influenced. Moreover, she was suffering from a frequent elderly sister attitude. She felt herself called upon not only to examine Sally in regard to her proceedings but to condemn her without any real evidence.

"Very well, Sally, unless you decide to confide in me immediately I shall be obliged to speak to Aunt Patricia."

At the conclusion of this speech Alice beheld in her sister's face the expression of sheer unrelenting obstinacy in which Sally was an adept. It was a contradiction to her pretty softness, her indolent manner and even to the elusive dimple which recently had vanished.

"I also warn you, Sally, that I intend to watch you and find out your proceedings for myself. In truth, I am frightened about you. If only Tante were here she could influence you, but Aunt Patricia will only become bitterly angry. I confess I don't know what she will say or do when she learns that I have no choice but to tell her."

If Alice Ashton had one characteristic which predominated over all others, it was a fine sense of honor, a high ideal of personal integrity.

As a matter of fact, she had never demanded the same standards from Sally she had asked of herself. It was a family custom to regard her younger sister as a person chiefly to be gratified and adored. Yet it had never occurred to Alice that Sally could fail in any essential thing such as straightforwardness and sincerity.

"I don't like to speak to you, Sally, or even to suggest the idea, but I am afraid a few of the girls may be criticizing what you are doing in a fashion you can scarcely imagine. They do not speak before me, but I can hardly fail to guess what they

are thinking from their manner. Sally, can't you realize that we are in a foreign country where the language, the customs, the ideas are not like ours? Even if what you are doing might not be considered wrong at home, can't you see that here in France you may be misunderstood? Please confide in me dear. You promised——"

But Sally's soft shoulders stiffened in resistance.

"Evidently you do not trust me yourself, Alice, and naturally your opinion is more important to me than anyone's else. Yet when one has lived with the same people a long time one does expect a certain amount of faith and understanding. I am sorry, for I cannot tell you what you wish to know at present. I may be able to in a very few days, if you will be good enough to wait and not speak to Aunt Patricia. It is hardly worth while to make a difficulty between us! Personally I am glad Tante *is* away; at least, I am glad she is away today, since it would have been more difficult to refuse my confidence to her than to any one else. But

I shall regret it if I am able to make my confession before her return. She at least would have tried to believe I have not intended to do anything wrong. Now please leave me alone, Alice. You were right, I am going out on an important errand. You need not worry over my going alone this time, because old Jean has promised to go with me as soon as he is free and I shall wait for him."

Then, although Alice lingered for several moments longer, when Sally would neither speak to her, nor look at her, she slowly left the room.

Afterwards when Alice had disappeared Sally's pretence of courage vanished and she sat with her hands clasped tightly together while the tears ran down her face.

All very well to pretend to Alice that she was convinced she had been doing no wrong. But was this true? In the end would she not have to pay dearly in the continuing condemnation and distrust of her friends? When her confession was finally made, would they even then understand and forgive her?

CHAPTER XV

The Discovery

A LITTLE more than an hour later Sally and Jean started forth upon their mysterious pilgrimage.

To have been spared the ordeal of this morning's visit to the French château Sally would have given a great deal. On other occasions she had been nervous and fearful, but never to the extent to which the recent conversation with her sister had reduced her.

More than once within the hour of waiting before she and Jean could slip away, Sally concluded to abandon her plan and never go near the château again, regardless of results. Then she remembered that she had given her word and that upon this visit many things were to be explained and arranged. Having endured so much of struggle, strain and suspicion, one must not fail in the end. And in spite of Sally's

apparent indolence and softness, failure had no part in her mental make-up.

Yet in being compelled to spend an hour of watching before daring to make her escape there was a sense of humiliation, almost of degradation. Nevertheless, what else could she do except wait until Alice was again absorbed in her teaching and until there was no one about the farm house or in the yard who would pay any especial attention to her actions?

Sally's final misfortune was in encountering Yvonne as she passed through the hall downstairs.

It may have been her imagination, due to her conversation with her sister. Sally felt almost convinced that Yvonne shrank away from her as she passed, almost as if she were drawing her skirts aside. In return Sally suffered a wave of indignation and the conviction that she would never be able to forgive Yvonne. She even had an impulse some day to avenge the other girl's injustice.

She and Jean did not immediately move off in the direction of the château. She and old Jean took an entirely opposite

direction, until in a field about half a mile away, altering their course, they walked rapidly toward the château. Sally never ceased to gaze behind them every few moments, fearing they might be followed.

Small wonder that with the unaccustomed walks and the burden of a serious responsibility Sally Ashton had altered in the past few weeks!

Indeed, her only solace had been the loyal faith and allegiance which the old French peasant, Jean, had given to her cause and to her.

From the first day, when in halting and broken French she had begged him to accompany her to the château to assist in the care of a wounded soldier, he had not asked a question or refused his services.

When it was impossible for him to escape Miss Patricia's vigilance at the hour Sally asked, she always found that he had managed to make the trip sometime later, during the day or night, and accomplished what was necessary. What he may have thought of the situation, what questions he may have asked himself behind the inscrutability of his weather-

SHE AND OLD JEAN TOOK AN ENTIRELY OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

beaten countenance with its misty, coal-black eyes, Sally never inquired. There were enough problems to meet without this. The important fact was that Jean never failed her and that he made an otherwise impossible task possible.

After discovering the serious illness of the wounded soldier in hiding, Sally Ashton had continued the amazing task of caring for him at the château.

She did not come to this decision immediately; indeed, it had grown so slowly that at times it did not appear as a decision at all. Nor did Sally attempt to justify herself. She felt compelled to take a courageous attitude with her sister, but she never had been convinced of her own patriotism or good sense. Even up to the present time she was not sure of the nationality of her patient, although it had been a relief that during his delirium he had spoken occasionally in French.

The truth is that as the days passed on and Sally's responsibility increased her attitude toward the soldier changed. At first she had been annoyed, bored with the entire adventure and with the circumstances

resulting from it. But as the young man's illness became more alarming and Sally's anxiety increased, a new characteristic awoke in her. Sally Ashton belonged to the type of girl who is essentially maternal. She would be one of the large group of women who love, marry and bring up a family and are nearly always adored by their husbands, but feel no passionate affection until the coming of their children.

So unconsciously the wounded soldier's dependence upon her for food and attention, for life itself, aroused Sally's motherly instinct, although she did not dream of the fact and would have been angry at the suggestion.

One convincing proof. In the beginning she had been both physically and mentally repelled by the soiled and blood-stained soldier and by his confused confession. She had not surrendered him to justice because she did not feel called upon to appear as the arbiter of any human being's fate and because she had not the dramatic instinct of most girls. But Sally had presumed the soldier would be arrested later

and was not particularly concerned with his future one way or the other.

Now her point of view had completely altered. At first her idea was merely that the soldier should recover with no other nursing save that which she and old Jean could bestow upon him. But now that he was recovering, she was equally determined he should be saved from whatever enemy he had feared before being delivered into her hands.

Before parting on the previous afternoon Sally had agreed with her patient that they discuss his situation on her next visit to the château.

As the old man and girl crept cautiously inside the opening between the arch of walls, they could see their soldier lying asleep upon his mattress, but between clean sheets and covered with blankets which Sally had managed to secure from the supply at the farm.

The half-dismantled room was cold but fragrant with the odors of the woods and fields. Perhaps the fresh air which had at all times flooded the odd sick-room had been in a measure responsible for the ill

man's recovery, having taken the place of other comforts he had been obliged to forego.

He opened his eyes at the approach of his two friends and looked a little wistfully at Sally.

"You have come at last! I was afraid you would not be able to manage. How kind you have been!"

Sally made no reply except to offer him a glass of milk and to stand silently by until he had finished drinking it.

She looked very sweet. Today her walk and the excitement of her morning had tired her so that she was paler than usual; yet her lips were full and crimson and her brown hair had a charming fashion of curling in little brown rings on her forehead as if she were a tiny child.

The soldier no longer wore any look of mental confusion except that his expression was puzzled and questioning.

"You are much better. I am glad," Sally said at last. "You see I do not know how often I can come to the château after today, unless you should become very

ill again and then I would come in any case."

Sally's direct fashion of speaking had its value amid the complexities of human relations.

Old Jean had disappeared to bring fresh water and to accomplish other tasks so that Sally and the soldier were alone for a little time.

As a matter of fact, Jean's had been the really difficult nursing. Night after night when the soldier's condition had been most critical Jean had made no pretence of going to bed, but had hobbled over at bedtime to remain until dawn by the ill man's side.

"Perhaps you will sit down for a little so that I can ask you a great many questions," the soldier suggested. "Now that I am getting back my senses, you can scarcely imagine what a mystery my present situation is."

Nodding agreement, Sally drew a beautiful French chair across the strange drawing-room and seated herself within a few feet of her patient's bed. It was odd that she had never felt any fear of the old

walls tumbling down upon her from the hour she had begun her nursing, although before that time she had believed nothing could force her to trust herself inside the ruins.

"I would like to ask you to begin at the beginning. In what condition and how long ago did you find me here? If I could only guess the time! But I am under the impression I have not been myself for several weeks until these last few days. Yet I have a vague recollection of finding my way to this old house and of seeing you standing one day framed in that open arch. After that I have no memory of anything else until I became conscious of your face and of old Jean's bending over me and then of this extraordinary place. If I have been ill, why have I not been cared for in a hospital?

"I remember escaping from the Germans who had taken me prisoner and then wandering, wandering about in a country where there were no trees, no grass, no houses, nothing but the upturned earth and exploded shells. Afterwards I was not sure I had reached the French coun-

try. I know I used to hide in the day time and prowl around at night. I think I must have become ill soon after my escape, because I have an indistinct impression that I was trying to find my old home, the château where I lived before the outbreak of the war. I suppose that is one reason why I hid myself in here. But nothing I can remember èxplains *you.*"

Sally sighed.

"I do not understand what you are talking about, at least not exactly. I am not even convinced you do. But if you really are a French soldier and managed to escape from the Germans, I am glad. I know you will think me stupid. but still how could I have been expected to understand that you were a French soldier when you seemed so horribly afraid of being discovered? You were in your own country and among your own people! Personally there is very little for me to tell about myself.

"I am an American girl, I don't suppose you consider me French, and I am living at a farm house not far away with some American friends. One day I was

taking a walk and just from curiosity slipped over here to look more closely at the château. It frightened me when I discovered you were hiding in here. You can never guess how you startled me! At our first meeting you told me some mixed-up story and asked me to bring you some food. I thought you were an escaped prisoner and I did not want to have anything to do with you. But you insisted if you were caught you would be hung. The next day when I arrived with the food you were too ill to recognize me. There is nothing more to tell."

"That is all," the soldier repeated. But that sounds more like the beginning, does it not? You were not even sure of my nationality and yet you have been coming here every day to care for me. Suppose I had been your enemy?"

By this time the soldier was sitting up and intently studying the face of the girl before him. He was wearing a faded dark blue shirt which Jean had generously bestowed upon him the day before, this being the first occasion for which he had made an effort to dress himself.

"Strange human beings, women! I wonder if we men will ever understand you? I have no doubt you would blow up the united armies of the Central Empires if it were possible without a qualm and yet you would make any sacrifice to save the life of one prisoner."

"But I was never convinced about you," Sally apologized." Then after you became so seriously ill I never thought. But I am sure I beg your pardon. As you are a Frenchman of course you would have been infinitely better cared for in a hospital. If anything had happened to you it would have been my fault. But really I did not know what was done to prisoners who ran away from their captors and you suggested such an uncomfortable fate for yourself.

"Now you are better I don't think I will come back to the château again. You see you made me promise not to tell anyone that you were hiding here, and my sister and friends think it strange because I have been spending so much time away from the farm recently. I don't suppose I shall ever be able to make anyone understand.

It is hard, isn't it, to be blamed for things and then find they have been of no use? Jean will do whatever is necessary for you until you are entirely well. He can bring me news of you and he will take a message to anyone you care to see if you do not feel strong enough to be moved to a hospital immediately."

Sally rose as if she meant to leave at once, then something in her companion's expression made her sink down into her chair.

"No, you must not come to see me again," he answered, "although I shall wish to see no one else. Perhaps it will not be long before I am able to call upon your friends if you will allow me. I am stronger than you realize; but you have not told me what you are doing in this neighborhood."

Unexpectedly Sally had a remarkable sensation. It was as if suddenly her position and the soldier's changed and as if he had begun to think of her welfare rather than to have her devote herself to his.

"Oh, we are doing reclamation work,"

Sally returned; "that is, my sister and friends are. I have not accomplished anything that is important. I told you I was stupid."

All at once Sally's soldier broke into a peal of clear boyish laughter which was of more benefit to him than either of them appreciated.

"No, you have done nothing except save my life. It is not kind of you under the circumstances to announce you consider it unimportant. Some day when I am able to rejoin my regiment perhaps I may be able to prove your work worth while. Thanks to you, perhaps I shall again serve France as I have never served her before! The enemy has taken from me everything else, my mother, my sister, my little brother and my home. I made up my mind that they should not hold me a prisoner whatever might befall me. If I had to give up my life I meant to die in the open."

Then more excited and exhausted than either he or Sally had appreciated, the soldier lay down again, closing his eyes.

It was a part of Sally's recent training

which made her continue sitting quietly beside him for the next few moments without speaking or moving.

In the interval she studied the soldier's face.

For the first time he was appearing to her as a man. Up until now he had simply been a human being who must be cared for, allowed to suffer as little as possible and at last be restored to health.

In considering him at present Sally did not particularly admire his appearance. She thought his nose was rather too large and his lips too thin and in spite of Jean's devotion, his services as a barber left a good deal to be desired.

"Your arm is nearly well, still I think I should like to bandage it once more before I go," Sally suggested. "You do not realize it, of course, but I have learned a great deal about nursing since I began to look after you. I don't like sick people, else I suppose I could become a Red Cross nurse after more training if I wished. But I don't think I should like the work."

As Sally talked she was accomplishing her task, certainly with a good deal more

skill than she had shown several weeks before.

However, her patient was not conscious of the fact. At present he was not thinking of his wound but of his nurse.

There was something about her so deliciously frank and ingenuous. At least she seemed ingenuous to him, although it was difficult always to be sure concerning Sally.

When she had finished the young Frenchman took one of her hands and touched it lightly with his lips.

"Will you tell me your name, please, and where to find you before you say farewell? I am Lieutenant Robert Fleury of the French-cuirassiers."

Ten minutes later Sally was walking back home alone to the farm house, having left Jean to continue to care for their patient.

She was not to go back to the château again and she was to tell her friends exactly what had taken place in the past few weeks. She seemed to have promised this to her patient.

Yet Sally was not sure when she would

tell her story. She had no desire to make a confession to Alice, and Aunt Patricia was not to be considered. If only she might arrange to wait until Mrs. Burton's return from her journey into southern France.

CHAPTER XVI

An Unexpected Shelter

IT was after the hour for their midday dinner when Sally finally arrived at the farmhouse; however, she was able to reach her own room without any questions being asked concerning her delay.

Undressing slowly with the idea of lying down for a little while before facing her friends, Sally was interrupted for the second time that day by the unexpected appearance of her sister. On this occasion Alice's expression made any further discussion not only unnecessary but impossible.

"Will you come with me, please, to Aunt Patricia's room?" she began at once. "I have been talking to Aunt Patricia and she says it is only fair that we should hear your explanation before passing judgment. I have spoken to no one else, although I suppose it will be impossible to hide the facts from the other girls.

In reality, I believe they already have guessed a great deal and have been trying to keep the truth from me."

At the moment of her sister's entrance Sally had been slipping into a little blue dressing gown which had been her mother's final gift the day before their parting. The dressing gown did not have a utilitarian appearance, since it was made of a soft blue, light woolen material with little clusters of yellow roses scattered over the design and with blue ribbons and lace about the throat and sleeves.

In response to her sister's speech Sally gathered about her the dressing gown, which she had not yet fastened, and immediately started to leave the room.

"I shall be very glad indeed to talk to Aunt Patricia, but not to you, Alice, nor do I ever intend to forgive you. I suppose you followed old Jean and me to the château and have drawn your own inference from what you observed. Do you know, Alice, I have often wondered why the puritanical conscience is always so suspicious of other people?" And in this last

speech of Sally's there was more of truth that she could fully appreciate.

But if in this final analysis she were speaking the truth, the first part of her remark had been a complete falsehood. At the present time there was nothing she desired so little as being forced into making her confession to Miss Patricia Lord, a severe spinster with no consideration for human folly. Would any one else on earth be more difficult or more unrelenting?

In the past hour or more, following her conversation at the château, Sally had been facing one of the hardest experiences of life.

Her weeks of self-sacrifice and devotion had been not only unnecessary, they had been absurd. If only she could have enjoyed the inward satisfaction of considering herself a heroine or a martyr! But she had risked her own reputation and the young French officers life to what end?

As the two girls entered Miss Patricia's room, Sally, accompanied by her sister, whose existence on earth she refused to recognize, considered that Miss Patricia

appeared as implacable as a stone image. Yet one could scarcely compare her to the Sphinx. That ancient stone figure with the head of a woman and the body of a lioness looks as if she had devoted the many centuries since her creation to solving the riddles of human life.

Miss Patricia would consider anything but plain speaking a sheer waste of energy and truth. There were no riddles in Miss Patricia's mental category.

Nevertheless, Miss Patricia's voice did not sound unkind when she suggested that Sally occupy the solitary chair in her bedroom, although undoubtedly this would leave the elderly woman standing as well as Alice. But then Sally did not realize how appealing her appearance was at this moment even to so harsh a critic of human nature.

Sally indolent, Sally dreaming her own small and rather selfish dreams, or a Sally self-assured and self-content were not unfamiliar figures to her world. But Sally confused and tired, hurt and bewildered, not by her own actions or any

one's else, but by a web of circumstance, was a new study.

"No, I would prefer not to sit down, Miss Patricia, and in any case I would not have you stand," Sally answered, still with an innate sense of her own dignity and value which at no time in her life was she ever wholly to lose. "Alice seems to have told you some disagreeable story about me. So I think it just as well for me to tell you the exact truth. I hope I can make you understand. I suppose I should have confided in some one before, but until a few hours ago I did not feel that I had the privilege.

Sally's golden brown eyes with the heavy upcurling lashes, which gave to her face the expression of unusual softness, were now gazing upward into Miss Patricia's. The latter's eyes were gallant also and steadfast, nor did Sally find them so distrustful as she had anticipated.

"Very well, my dear, go on with your story. I thought Alice was too much excited," Miss Patricia returned, seating herself in her upright chair, as Sally seemed to prefer her to be seated.

Then with her little dressing gown wrapped about her as if it had been a Roman toga, Sally told the history of the past weeks, her unexpected discovery of the wounded soldier amid the ruins of the old French château, her belief that he was a runaway prisoner and notwithstanding this, her effort, with Jean's assistance, to restore him to health.

Sally's explanation was less confused than her conversation with the French soldier a short time before. However, since that hour many things had become clearer in her own mind. She did not break down until her story was completed and only then when she turned toward her sister.

"I don't know, Alice, what you and the other Camp Fire girls have been thinking of me, and I don't believe I care to guess. I know you have not been generous. But since I don't wish to discuss the subject with any one save Aunt Patricia, and with Tante of course when she returns, I wish you would offer the other girls any interpretation of my behavior you care to give."

At this Sally's voice broke in spite of her efforts at self-control. When Alice made a step toward her with her arms outstretched to ask forgiveness, Sally stepped back only to find herself enfolded by Miss Patricia and to hear Miss Patricia declare:

"I think it would be wiser, Alice, for you to leave Sally and me alone for a little time; she is tired and unstrung. If you and the other girls have been unfair, you will have an opportunity to apologize later. Then Sally herself will feel more inclined to be reasonable."

Afterwards, when Alice had reluctantly disappeared, unexpectedly Sally found herself seated as if she were a child in Aunt Patricia's lap and listening to a very wise and tender conversation, one she was never to forget, from a woman of deep and broad experience.

When she grew less disturbed Aunt Patricia made no effort not to scold Sally for her unwisdom and her lack of reliance upon older judgment than her own. But the great fact was that Aunt Patricia was never unfair, that she had no sentimental

suspicions and made no accusations with which Sally could not fairly agree.

In their half hour together Sally Ashton learned to appreciate for the rest of her life Aunt Patricia's value, learned to understand why Mrs. Burton cared for her so devotedly and considered her a tower of strength in adversity. In this uncertain world in which we live there are fair weather and foul weather friends. Miss Patricia belonged to the number who not only fail to strike other people when they are down, but who spend all their energy and strength in the effort to lift them up again.

Later on the other Camp Fire girls were also to form a new estimate of Miss Patricia's character, but simply by force of circumstance Sally was the first one of them to be admitted inside the stern citadel with which the elderly spinster surrounded her great heart.

"In the morning, Sally, when you have rested, and if I were you, child, I would spend this afternoon in bed, why I intend to walk over with you to your château and make the acquaintance of your soldier. If

he is a gentleman my dear, or even if he is a real man, I mean to bring him here to the farm house to remain as our guest until he has completely recovered. Now, don't argue with me, Sally. Mrs. Burton will tell you that I am a hopeless old woman with whom to have an argument. I simply never do any one's way except my own. I do not wish to discuss this side of the situation with you to any extent, but don't you see, my dear, that it is better for you that we have your soldier here? No one shall think your friends have not understood and approved of your care of this young Frenchman."

Sally murmured her acquiescence and her gratitude. Yet suddenly she felt that she wished never again to see the young officer who for the past few weeks had been her constant thought and care.

He had recovered sufficiently no longer to need her services and although he was not wilfully responsible, nevertheless he had given her a great deal of care and trouble.

"Of course you must do what you think best, Aunt Patricia," Sally added a

moment later, as she was preparing to start to her own room. "But don't you think we had best wait until Tante's return?"

Aunt Patricia shook her head.

"What Polly Burton may think or desire in the matter will not have the slightest influence with me. She cheerfully surrendered you girls into my charge in order to make this trip, of which she knew I thoroughly disapproved. However, in spite of the fact that I am very angry with her, I do not wish any one else to feel uneasy, although I shall not have a happy moment until she returns."

CHAPTER XVII

Two Officers

A WEEK later two young officers were guests at the farm house on the Aisne, one of them an American aerial lieutenant, the other a lieutenant in the French cavalry.

Following his telegram within a few days, Lieutenant Ralph Marshall had arrived to spend a short furlough, ostensibly with the entire group of American Camp Fire girls, although in reality his visit was to Peggy Webster. Notwithstanding the fact that he and Peggy were not supposed to be engaged, chiefly because of Peggy's youth, they shared a different conviction from their families.

The other young officer was none other than "Sally's soldier." Absurd as the title appeared, particularly to Sally herself, nevertheless under this name he was discussed secretly and at length in the Camp Fire household.

Toward late afternoon on the day after Sally's enforced confession, accompanied only by Old Jean, Miss Patricia Lord had tramped across the fields to the French château and had there interviewed its inmate with a directness and a searchlight quality worthy of a public prosecutor.

As a result she had received more valuable information than Sally Ashton had acquired in the hour of their mutual and confused avowal. Among other things Miss Patricia had learned that the wounded officer's extraordinary outfit was due to the fact that he believed it would make his escape more feasible.

But whatever the details of his story, he was able to inspire Miss Patricia with sufficient interest and faith to admit him as a temporary guest at the farm house in spite of the absence of Mrs. Burton.

However, although undoubtedly a guest, he was a guest according to rules and restrictions laid down and adhered to by Miss Patricia and her household.

In the first place, until he had completely recovered he was to remain in his room at the farm house, cared for only

by old Jean with occasional visits from Miss Patricia. Under no circumstances was he to see or meet for the present a single one of the Camp Fire girls. This rule was particularly to be observed with regard to Sally Ashton.

Miss Patricia made no effort to conceal her intention of making a thorough investigation of the account of his life the French officer had imparted to her. She knew it would not be so difficult to verify his statements. It was possible to communicate with the commander of his regiment and also his friends, as he claimed to have lived in the French country not many miles away from their neighborhood in the valley of the Aisne. After his recovery doubtless he would be able to find a number of his former acquaintances by returning to his old home.

It was in his favor that the French officer entirely agreed with Miss Patricia's attitude in every particular save one. But he was wise enough not to argue with her concerning this. In truth, thirty-six hours after his installation at the farm house, the young Frenchman and Miss

Patricia had become surprisingly intimate friends. One could explain this by stating that the officer had a delightful sense of humor and a valuable appreciation of character. Miss Patricia announced that no friendship could have been possible between them if Lieutenant Fleury's mother had not had the good sense to have him taught English by an English governess when he was a small boy. His accent Miss Patricia considered as peculiar as her own French one, nevertheless they were able to understand each other amazingly well.

One brilliant morning Miss Patricia entered the French officer's room bearing a cup of bouillon to find him staring out a window which he had just opened in order to let in the air and for another purpose which Miss Patricia instantly suspected.

"Breaking parole," she commented tersely.

The young officer had not heard her entrance. In return he swung round and laughed.

"Is that fair, Miss Lord? A cat may look at a king, *comme cá* why not at a num-

ber of queens? Besides, don't you realize it is a miracle for a French soldier to be able to dream that these devastated fields of France are soon to become green and fruitful again? Having lost everything in the early days of the German invasion, my family, home, my small fortune, nevertheless I rejoice that for other French soldiers there may be a happier future when they return to their former homes, thanks to the great hearts of the American people!"

The young officer's deep feeling and his quiet self-contained manner caused a lump to rise in Miss Patricia's throat and a mist before her eyes. Therefore her manner became more belligerent than ever.

Here, sit down and drink this," she commanded. "I suppose you consider that you have entirely recovered your strength and that I am the veriest old termagant not to permit you to enjoy your convalescence with a group of more or less charming American girls. But as a matter of fact I am really protecting you as well as the girls. We have lived without masculine society, unless you wish to count

old Jean, ever since our arrival at the farm house. So whatever your impression, I am afraid you would soon be overpowered with attention once I allowed you to leave this room."

Lieutenant Fleury finished his bouillon with a proper degree of gratitude and enthusiasm before replying.

Afterwards he gazed at Miss Patricia for several moments in silence as if carefully considering a number of important matters.

The young French officer was of more than medium height, had dark eyes and hair, and except when he was talking, his expression was grave and sad. His arm remained bandaged.

"Miss Patricia, I do not wish to meet *all* your Camp Fire girls. I agree with you I am not strong enough to make myself agreeable to them. But I do wish to see *one* of them again. You are aware that I mean Miss Ashton. If ever a man had cause to be grateful to a girl——"

"Nonsense!" Miss Patricia interrupted, picking up the empty cup as if she were intending to leave the room immediately.

"Sally was a goose and ran the risk of being the death of you instead of saving your life as you like to think. Besides, she has not the slightest desire to see you; she told me this herself. She feels now that she was ridiculous. She should never have paid any attention to the disjointed tale of an ill man, or to the promise which you seem to have exacted of the poor child in your original interview. As for being grateful to Sally, that is also a waste of energy when you have none too much to spare. The one dream of every girl in the world these days is to be allowed the privilege of caring for a good-looking soldier. Sally had her opportunity under particularly romantic and nonsensical circumstances. Besides, men will always be grateful to Sally Ashton for something or other as long as she lives, grateful because she is pretty and soft and selfish and, dear me, I suppose she is what one calls essentially feminine! I confess I have rather a tender feeling toward the child myself."

And without further answer to his request Miss Patricia hurriedly departed.

Outdoors at the same time Sally was occupied in the garden digging in a desultory fashion. As soon as there was no further danger of the ground freezing the Camp Fire girls were planning to plant a garden.

Sally was alone at her task and alone because she preferred solitude.

After her fantastic escapade had been disclosed to the other Camp Fire girls, those of them who had been particularly annoyed by her mysterious behavior were frankly regretful of their condemnation. They did not whole-heartedly approve of what she had done, but no one doubted Sally's good intention or the unselfishness of her motive. Aside from Yvonne, whose attitude continued puzzled and distrustful, each girl individually had approached Sally with a carefully veiled apology. However, Sally, who was not in a friendly state of mind toward the world at present, received their advances coldly.

The only two persons whose opinion she really valued were Aunt Patricia's and Mrs. Burton's. Aunt Patricia had been kinder and more understanding than any

human being could have dreamed possible. Mrs. Burton had not yet returned from her journey into southern France. Indeed, no word had been heard from her in a number of days, so that not alone did Aunt Patricia suffer from uneasiness. The great German drive so long expected was fanning the long line of the French battlefront into fiercer and more terrorizing flames. At any hour the greatest struggle in human history would once more burst upon the world.

An hour later Sally Ashton knocked shyly upon Lieutenant Fleury's closed door. She did not do this in accordance with her own wishes, but because of an urgent appeal made by Miss Patricia.

As a matter of fact, for some days Miss Patricia had been haunted by the story of his life, since the outbreak of the war, which the young French officer had recounted to her. He was not conscious of asking for sympathy, nor did he consider his story unusual. Nevertheless it occurred to Miss Patricia this morning that she was unwilling to add loneliness to the difficulties which he must face during the

hours of his return to health. Up to the present time he had been too engaged with his soldiering to allow much opportunity for reflection.

Miss Patricia was also convinced of the truth of what Lieutenant Fleury had told her of himself, although she had no thought of not adding the necessary proof to her instinctive conviction. But in the meantime if he really earnestly desired to see and talk to Sally Ashton and to express his gratitude, what possible harm could come of allowing them an interview? Their acquaintance had been achieved under such remarkable circumstances, to meet in a more ordinary and formal fashion would doubtless be best for them both. Afterwards they would not develop fantastic and untruthful ideas concerning each other.

At the moment of Sally's arrival Lieutenant Fleury was despondent. It was true he had managed to escape from the Germans and could congratulate himself that he was not a prisoner and might hope within a reasonable length of time to return to his own regiment. Nevertheless

what an extraordinarily stupid adventure he had stumbled into in his sub-conscious effort to seek the neighborhood of his former home!

He had come out of the experience a thousand times better than he had any right to hope, yet had he not involved an American girl in what must have been an extremely disagreeable and ungrateful task?

At this moment of her entrance into the invalid's room Sally Ashton did not appear to have been seriously affected by her experience.

Her hour of working in the garden in the warm late winter sun had given her cheeks the color they frequently lacked, or else it was her embarrassment at meeting the young officer. Sally's hair was also curling in the delicious and irresponsible fashion it often assumed, breaking into small rings on her forehead and at the back of her neck in the fashion of which she at least pretended to disapprove.

"Miss Patricia said you wished to speak to me. I am glad you are so much better," she began in a reserved and ceremonious

fashion as if she and the lieutenant had met on but one previous occasion before today.

In truth it seemed impossible to Sally that the French officer whom she was facing at present had been the ill and dishevelled boy she had found in hiding at the château and nursed back to comparative health.

In announcing that Sally did not desire to see the young French officer again, Miss Patricia had been correct. Sally considered that she had made a grave and foolish mistake and preferred, as most of us do, that her mistake be ignored and forgotten.

Yet Lieutenant Fleury had no idea either of ignoring or forgetting Sally's effort in his behalf.

Immediately in reply to her knock he had risen. His serious expression had now changed to one of boyish gratitude and good humor.

"Yes, I did wish to speak to you; you are kind to have come," he returned, although in reality surprised by Sally's extremely youthful appearance. He had only a confused memory of her face bend-

ing above him during his delirium. They had enjoyed but one conversation when he was entirely himself. On that occasion he had supposed his rescuer a young woman of some years and dignity, and Sally at present looked like a school girl. Indeed, she was a school girl when at home in her own part of the world if one can count college and school as one and the same thing.

After coming in from the garden this morning she had hastily changed her everyday Camp Fire dress for a white flannel of which she was especially fond, and without observing that the skirt had shrunk until it was extremely short.

"I wished to tell you once again how more than grateful I am to you for your great kindness," the officer continued, smiling in spite of his serious state of mind at the unexpectedness of Sally's appearance. Looking at her now, it was hard to believe that she had ever assumed the arduous burden of nursing a wounded soldier under more than trying conditions. Yet if Sally had not been imma-

ture, she would have never have shouldered such a responsibility!

She was smiling now and dimpling in an irresistible fashion.

"Will you make me a promise?" she demanded. "It is the one thing I ask of you. If you are really under the impression that I was good to you when I was merely risking your life, then promise never to refer to what I did for you as long as you live and never mention the story to anybody who could have the faintest chance of knowing me. You see," Sally continued, her manner becoming more confidential, "I realize now that from every point of view I was foolish. It is kind of you to have turned out to be some one whom Miss Patricia and all of us are able to know, for you might have been a most impossible person."

The young French officer laughed. As he recalled their last meeting and this one his benefactress struck him as a person who had the gift of provoking laughter.

"I think this a good deal to require of me," he returned. "I will do what you ask only on condition that you——"

"That I promise to allow you to do a favor for me some day?" Sally completed the unfinished sentence. "I suppose that is what you were about to say, wasn't it? Of course you can do whatever kindness you like if you have the chance. But it does not seem probable. After you go away from the farm I can't imagine any reason why we should ever see each other again. Besides, you would do whatever you could for me whether I gave you permission or not." Here Sally smiled a second time.

For an instant the French officer stared, nonplussed.

But he was not the first person whom Sally had puzzled. She was so matter of fact and so sure of herself one could not tell whether she was extremely simple or correspondingly subtle.

Since her companion regarded her as a child, he could have but one impression.

When finally he held out his hand, Sally hesitated an instant before placing her own inside his. His exhibition of French courtesy and gratitude at their last meeting had been slightly embarrassing. But

this time the lieutenant only held her hand gravely.

"You are right, Miss Ashton, whatever was possible to show my gratitude to you I should do, with or without your permission. If I am spared when the war is over I may even create the opportunity which you seem to doubt my ever having. When the war began I had a sister who was, I think, perhaps only a few years older than you. If you can ever make up your mind to regard me as she would have done, it would mean a great real to me."

Sally was beginning to feel bored. She thought her companion was very conventional and a little stupid.

She had not the faintest desire to adopt an unknown young man as a brother. Sally knew herself sufficiently well to realize that the sisterly attitude would make but little appeal to her as long as she lived. And she hoped that her interview with the rescued officer might be entertaining. Life was dull now at the farm with Mrs. Burton away and her own occupation, which had been exciting even if fatiguing, withdrawn.

"What happened to your sister?" Sally inquired politely, although intending to make her escape as soon as possible should their conversation continue on such sentimental lines.

"She was killed in the retreat when the Germans conquered this part of France at the outbreak of the war. I had gone to the front to join my regiment, so Yvonne and my mother were alone except for my little brother and a few women servants. Our château was destroyed."

The French officer paused because Sally was looking at him with a curious expression as if an idea which she may have had in her mind for some time was now slowly crystalizing into a fact.

"Your sister's name was Yvonne Fleury and your château was not far from here, was it not?" Sally demanded.

The young officer nodded. He did not care to discuss his past history with Sally or with any one else in the world. There was nothing to be gained by recalling the inevitable tragedies of the war.

Sally did not appear seriously distressed. Unless she happened to be an

actual witness to suffering it did not touch her deeply. Besides, at the present time she was smiling oddly, as if she were pleased and displeased at the same time.

"I don't think that you need adopt me as your sister," she remarked.

Until this moment they had both continued standing.

Now Sally made a little motion toward the invalid's chair which Miss Patricia had removed from their sitting-room to bestow upon her patient.

"Suppose we both sit down," she suggested, taking the only other chair at the same instant.

"There is something else I wish to talk to you about if you feel you are strong enough to hear. It may prove to be good news. I suppose it seems a strange coincidence, although some people would call it an act of Providence, but I am sure I don't understand such things. It is just barely possible your sister Yvonne Fleury was not killed. When we were crossing to France from the United States we met a girl on shipboard named Yvonne Fleury, whose

home, the Château Yvonne, had been destroyed in the early part of the war. As she believed her brother had been killed at the front, she had gone to New York City, where she had been living with some friends for several years. She told the entire family tragedy to our chaperon, Mrs. Burton, who afterwards told the story to us, hoping we might be especially kind to Yvonne because of her unhappiness. The other girls have been, but Yvonne and I do not like each other and she has been very disagreeable to me. Still, if she turns out to be your sister, it does not matter. Under the circumstances I suppose I ought to say nothing against her.

"I have been thinking of this for some time, ever since you told me your name, but of course there may be nothing in it. I only thought if you might like to meet this Yvonne Fleury—you see she came here to the farm and is living with us—I will speak first to Aunt Patricia and together you can decide."

In reality Sally was not so unsympathetic or so childish as at present her words

and manner suggested. During her long speech she had been watching the young officer narrowly. She had arrived at her present conclusion by putting certain facts together in a practical and common-sense fashion. There was more than a possibility that she might be wrong, so there was no reason for working oneself up into a state of hysteria or of heroics. Moreover, Sally had been entirely frank. She understood that the French officer would be overjoyed if Yvonne should prove to be his sister, but Sally herself would have felt no enthusiasm over the same discovery. As a matter of fact, she had no particular interest in Yvonne's opportunity for happiness through her aid.

She was worried, however, because her former patient suddenly appeared so white and shaken by her words, when only a few moments before he had looked so remarkably well.

Sally moved slowly backwards toward the door.

"I'll go and find Aunt Patricia; perhaps I should have spoken to her first of

my idea. Then after you have talked with her if you would like me to find Yvonne and ask her to come to you——"

With these words, having managed to reach the half closed door, Sally disappeared.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Expected Happens

MISS PATRICIA LORD was on her way to the French village only a few miles from their farm house. Unless the call were urgent, rarely did Miss Patricia bestow her activities outside the environments of the farm, which of course included the house, garden, barns, fields, really a sufficient large sphere of activity even for her.

It is true she had been an extremely practical benefactress to the entire neighborhood, yet her gifts had been made largely through other persons; Mrs. Burton or one of the Camp Fire girls reporting a special need among their neighbors, as promptly as possible Miss Patricia had seen that need supplied.

So, as she took her walk on this summer afternoon, had she liked she might have given a good deal of credit to herself for the change in the appearance of the coun-

tryside which the past two months had wrought.

A number of the peasants' huts near the road had been either entirely or partly rebuilt. But more important than the actual physical shelter, Miss Patricia's tractor had plowed its way over many acres which otherwise must have remained unproductive until, as far as the eye could see, the fields were now being made ready for planting. Even if German guns were thundering along the battle line, nevertheless behind that line the French peasants toiled on with their patience and their eternal industry.

Today Miss Patricia was thinking of life's contrasts, of the peaceful scenes through which she was passing which only a few years before had been an altar of the world's carnage and which might soon be so sacrificed again.

For it would seem as if the last gigantic struggle of the present war were now about to take place. Surely humanity would never pass through this universal Calvary again!

Not yet had Mrs. Burton returned from her journey into southern France!

A few days before, a letter stating that, having accomplished a portion of their mission, she, Mrs. Bishop and Monsieur Duval were preparing to start on their homeward way, had arrived for Miss Patricia, although the letter had been delayed for a week.

A more important witness of their mission had been the actual return to the French village of a number of the refugees in whose welfare Mrs. Burton had been especially interested. Among them was the French girl, Elise.

At this moment Miss Patricia was intending to pay a call to offer her congratulations to Elise and her grandmother and also to learn if Elise had seen Mrs. Burton or heard any definite information concerning her. The visit was not one to which she looked forward with pleasure, but was due to the fact that Mrs. Burton had asked it of her as a favor. Miss Patricia's use of the French tongue was so impossible that all conversation between her and her French neighbors was

an agony. Moreover, her unconsciously fierce manner seemed always to disconcert the courteous peasants.

Nevertheless, the old men and women and children whom she met on the road into the village and later upon the village streets bowed to her with more than ordinary friendliness. If they could not comprehend her words or her manner, the value of her kindness they could understand.

A child ran out of one of the houses and unexpectedly presented Miss Patricia with a little battered image of St. Joseph, and although St. Joseph is one of the patron saints of marriage, Miss Patricia accepted her gift with warm appreciation.

An hour later, when she received the first intimation of what had occurred, Miss Patricia was standing in the little yard in front of their hut with Grand'-mère and Elise.

There was no restraint about Grand'-mère's conversation now that her granddaughter was restored to her; indeed, she was pouring forth such a flood of rapid speech that Miss Patricia had the sensa-

tion of drowning in a sea of words of which she could understand about one in fifty.

Nevertheless, it was pleasant to glance now and then toward Elise, who was as charmingly pretty as her neighbors and friends had described her. From her weeks of enforced imprisonment and something nearly approaching starvation, the young French girl was thin and haggard. Yet as nothing more terrible had happened, she was too rejoiced over her return not to show delight and gratitude in every expression of her vivid face. Moreover, after being allowed to cross the borderland from Germany into France, she really had a meeting of a few moments with Mrs. Burton, who had given her the money and the information necessary for her homecoming.

At the moment when one of Elise's friends ran into the yard from an unexpected direction, Miss Patricia's first sensation was that of relief. At least she could enjoy a short respite from her position of exclusive audience to Grand'mère. The woman appeared so excited and so full

of some story she undoubtedly had come to tell, that immediately she became the center of attention. Moreover, a dozen other persons soon followed her until in a few seconds the little yard was crowded with gesticulating figures.

Miss Patricia was about to withdraw when a single word arrested her attention. The word was of course pronounced in French fashion, yet in the past few weeks Aunt Patricia had learned to recognize its peculiar French intonation. The word was Mrs. Burton's name.

Through guessing, through intuition and also through the united efforts of her new friends, soon after Miss Patricia learned as much of the woman's tale as it was desirable for her to hear at the present time.

This story had spread through the village. A French ambulance bearing the sign of the *croix de rouge* had just driven through the town en route to the farm house on the Aisne, the present home of the Camp Fire girls. Returning from her work in southern France, Mrs. Burton had been injured and rather than be cared for

in a hospital had begged to be brought directly to the farm.

As a matter of fact, Miss Patricia arrived at the farm house exactly two minutes before the Red Cross ambulance drew up before the front door. How she managed this one could only discover from Miss Patricia. The village owned a single motor car used in transporting supplies and Miss Patricia saw that it traveled faster on this occasion than ever before in its history.

Besides, Mrs. Burton, who was so swathed in bandages one could scarcely recognize her, the ambulance contained Monsieur Duval, the French senator, Mrs. Bishop and a Red Cross nurse.

Ignoring them all, Aunt Patricia lifted Mrs. Burton in her arms and carried her upstairs to her room, placing her upon the bed.

An hour later, when the farm house had grown strangely quiet and everybody had been sent outdoors except the nurse and a doctor who had been hastily summoned, Aunt Patricia stalked down the steps into the drawing-room. Here she found Mon-

sieur Duval and Mrs. Bishop waiting to explain the situation to her.

They had been motoring toward home and several miles back of the French line, when without any reason for such a catastrophe, a shell had dropped from a German aeroplane and exploded near their car.

Aside from Mrs. Burton, no member of the party had been hurt, but a piece of the shell had imbedded itself inside her chest and was supposed to be too near her lungs for an operation.

"Do you mean that Polly Burton has a chance to live without an operation?" Miss Patricia demanded in grim tones when her two companions had finished their unsatisfying explanation of what had taken place.

Mrs. Bishop shook her head.

"I am afraid not; that is why we took the risk of bringing her home to you when she wished so much to come."

"Is there a chance for her to recover through an operation?" Miss Patricia next asked without a perceptible change either in her expression or manner.

This time, as Mrs. Bishop appeared unable to speak, Monsieur Duval answered instead.

"There is one in a hundred, but we dared not accept the responsibility without first coming to you."

"Then telegraph at once for the best surgeon in Paris who can be spared and also for Captain Richard Burton. I will give you his address. In the meantime, if you can find hospitality elsewhere than at our farm I shall be grateful. We shall have but little opportunity to make visitors comfortable for the next few days."

With this Miss Patricia withdrew.

CHAPTER XIX

The Field of Honor

SOME little time afterwards, late on a March afternoon, the yard in front of the farm house on the Aisne, chosen by the Camp Fire girls for their temporary home in France, was occupied by a number of persons. They had separated into groups and were either walking about the place or else were seated in informal attitudes.

On the wooden steps leading directly down from the house two girls moved aside to allow a woman and a man to pass them.

The woman was Miss Patricia, who appeared taller and more painfully gaunt than ever, and moreover, was laying down the law upon some subject in her usual didatic fashion. Yet the man whose arm was slipped through hers was regarding her with devoted and amused affection. According to Captain Richard Burton and

in the opinion of a number of other persons, Miss Patricia's good sense and devotion in the past few weeks had saved his wife's life.

Miss Patricia was discussing with him the question of increasing the number of cows upon the farm until a dairy could be run upon really scientific principles. She desired a dairy sufficiently large to supply milk to the nearby hospitals as well as to the babies in the villages. Up to the present time she had been largely interested in preserving the health of the young children who came within her sphere of effort. But realizing that milk at present was one of the greatest needs in France for the proper feeding of the wounded soldiers and of the convalescents, Miss Patricia was arranging for the shipment of a herd of a hundred cows from the United States. As a matter of fact, she was supposed to be asking Captain Burton's advice upon the subject, though Miss Patricia's method of asking advice was merely to announce what she intended doing.

After watching the two older persons

disappear toward the barn, which had been restored until it presented a very comfortable aspect, Peggy Webster glanced up from her knitting to look earnestly at her companion.

"How long do you intend remaining in France to continue with the reconstruction work, Vera?" she inquired.

Vera Lagerloff was sewing upon a dress for one of the children in the neighborhood, since few of them had clothing enough to keep them warm and comfortable in spite of all that was being done for them in the reclamation districts by an increasing force of American women and girls.

Vera's eyes followed the direction Miss Patricia's tall figure had just taken.

"I intend to stay on indefinitely until the war is over and afterwards if I feel I can be of more use here than anywhere else. A few days ago Miss Patricia told me that she would be very glad to pay my expenses, as she believed I was 'a laborer worthy of my hire.' What an extraordinary woman she is and how much she seems to get out of life, if not for herself, then certainly for other people! I shall never

forget our first meeting and the way in which she then took hold of the situation. I think none of us will forget her recent devotion to Mrs. Burton. Any one of us would have been willing to do what she did, only no one would have had the courage or the intelligence."

Peggy nodded. "I have written mother pretty much the same thing you have just said. Certainly no one of our family can ever pay our debt to Aunt Patricia. Not that I should dare make the attempt!" Peggy added, smiling and looking a little anxiously at the sock she was about to finish. "But I wonder if I am envious of you, Vera, I mean of your planning to remain over here so long? Mother and father have writen they would like me to come home as soon as I feel I am not especially needed and Tante has entirely recovered. They wish her to return as well, but I am by no means sure she will. There are moments of course when I am homesick and feel it my duty to be with my own people, now that Billy is gone and Dan has at last been permitted to volunteer. Then on the other hand, I naturally

want to be in France while Ralph is here fighting. Have I told you that after Ralph's visit to us at the farm my family has consented to our engagement. We have promised not to consider marrying until the war is over. I am not speaking of this to any of the other Camp Fire girls, Vera, only to you and Bettina. But I shall always think of you, even if the future should separate us for a long time, as if you were almost my sister. I suppose if Billy had lived you would have been my sister."

In response Vera shook her head with its heavy mass of dark hair.

"I don't know, Peggy. I am not at all sure. I don't believe Billy's friendship and mine were like that. Perhaps when he grew older he would have wished to marry a prettier and more romantic girl, but always he would have come back to me for criticism and praise. Yet I should never have wished to marry any one else and now I shall never marry any one."

As there is no real answer to a speech of this character, Peggy Webster made no reply. What Vera's future held in store

for her was, according to an ancient pagan expression, "in the lap of the gods."

But Peggy wrinkled her brows at this moment, making a little motion with her hand to attract Vera's attention to the figure of a girl who was standing alone about a dozen yards beyond them.

"Sally looks pretty, does she not, with her dark hair and white dress? But of course nothing would induce her to confess that there is any especial reason why she wishes to look particularly attractive this afternoon. She is a funny child," Peggy concluded with the superior manner of an engaged person.

This afternoon the Camp Fire girls were enjoying a half holiday and the unusual celebration of afternoon tea in honor of Mrs. Burton's recovery and also the arrival of the two guests whom they were now waiting out of doors to greet.

Almost immediately after the reunion of Yvonne Fleury and her brother they left the farm together, returning to the neighborhood of their own château. Mrs. Burton's dangerous condition had made them feel it wiser to add no more responsi-

bility to the household. They also desired to look up the old friends whom they might be able to find still living near their former home.

Until this afternoon neither one of them had returned to the farm house even for a brief visit, although of course many letters had been exchanged between Yvonne and the other girls. Now Mary Gilchrist had motored over to the nearest railroad station to meet them and Yvonne and her brother, Lieutenant Fleury, were expected at any moment.

Ten minutes later, when the motor containing the two guests finally arrived, Sally Ashton was the only one of the group of friends who did not go forward to welcome the newcomers.

She did not believe that she particularly liked either of them and there would be time enough to do her duty later.

As a matter of fact, Sally was about to slip around the side of the house toward the kitchen to assist in the preparation of their simple tea when Lieutenant Fleury followed her and as he called her by name she felt obliged to stop and speak to him.

He looked extremely well as if he had entirely recovered from his illness and was better looking than Sally would have dreamed possible.

"You do not seem enthusiastic about seeing me again?" Lieutenant Fleury began, smiling at Sally.

"I am very glad to find you so well," Sally announced as she shook hands. It was difficult to confuse Sally. She had a great deal of poise of her own kind and a little superior air of detachment which was oddly amusing.

"Yes, I am very well, thanks to you. Still I insist upon knowing why you are not pleased to see me? I remember you snubbed me for suggesting that we might develop a sisterly and brotherly affection for each other, but now I have discovered Yvonne, won't you be friends? It is hard upon me if you refuse to consent because my burden of gratitude to you must then be all the heavier. I am going back to join my regiment in a few days. Today I also came to warn Miss Lord and Captain Burton that there will be danger later this spring if you insist upon remaining here

at your farm house. I cannot speak plainly, but I have reason to believe the German drive will not be long delayed. The Allied line will hold; they shall never break through, yet it might be wiser if you were out of the range of any possible danger."

Without discussion of the question and disregarding the delightful possibility of tea, Sally and Lieutenant Fleury were walking side by side away from the farm house yard and toward the old château.

"You are very kind, Lieutenant Fleury," Sally answered, speaking more gravely and with less childishness than one might have imagined, "but I do not believe we will consent to leave our farm house and to give up our work unless the war comes almost to our very door. Even then you know food might be useful to the soldiers and I am an extremely good cook."

Sally's seriousness had disappeared and she was more her accustomed self.

"Yet you have not answered my question or promised to be my friend," Lieutenant Fleury argued, looking at his com-

panion with an amused frown. Undoubtedly it was difficult to understand any human being who could be such a complete child at one moment and so wise the next; but perhaps Sally embodied the Biblical idea that true wisdom is only found among childish spirits.

As a matter of fact, Sally answered simply, "Why, of course I am your friend, Lieutenant Fleury. Now when I am beginning to understand more of what soldiers must endure, I feel as if I were a friend to every man in our allied armies, although they probably are not aware of the honor," and again Sally dimpled in irresistible fashion.

Moreover, with this general acceptance of his friendship, Lieutenant Fleury was obliged to appear content, since Sally would give him no more satisfactory reply.

A few weeks later the long-heralded German drive burst with renewed fury along a long line in France. How the group of American Camp Fire girls met the unexpected dangers and demands upon their courage and resources will be the subject of the next Camp Fire book.

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